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Skelton, P.

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THE

COMPLETE WORKS

OF THE LATE

REV. PHILIP SKELTON,

RECTOR OF FINTONA, &c. &c.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

BURDY'S LIFE OF THE AUTHOR.

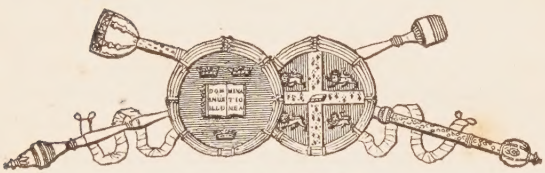
EDITED BY THE

REV. ROB$^{T.}$ LYNAM, A. M.

ASSISTANT CHAPLAIN TO THE MAGDALEN HOSPITAL.

IN SIX VOLUMES:

VOL. IV.



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Ophiomaches:

OR,

DEISM REVEALED.

IN EIGHT DIALOGUES.

Ἀρχαῖος μὲν οὖν τις λόγος καὶ πάτριός ἐστι πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις, ὡς ἐκ Θεοῦ τὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ Θεοῦ ἡμῖν συνέστηκεν· οὐδεμία δὲ φύσις αὐτὴ καθ' ἑαυτὴν αὐτάρκης ἐρημωθεῖσα τῆς ἐκ τούτου σωτηρίας.—ARISTOT. de Mundo.

——— Ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἂν διδάξειεν, εἰ μὴ Θεὸς ὑφηγοῖτο.—PLATO in Epinom.

TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LADY ARBELLA DENNY.

MADAM,

ABOUT two thousand years ago, this was an old adage, Nothing can be said which was not said before. The rectitude of a saying, which, if true, forestalls all possibility of original composition, at least in an age so late as this, might be plausibly enough arraigned by the tribe of writers, were it not for the assertion of him, who, a thousand years earlier still, on more than questionable authority, maintained, that there was, even then, nothing new under the sun. But were either of these sayings false in all other things, they must be most glaringly true of dedications. In these, vanity, adulation, interest, and sometimes indeed gratitude, have so long, so often racked and hackneyed invention, as to leave the panegyrical, the most beaten road in the world. The Appian is new to it.

One thing however, a little new in the way of dedications, this pretends to, and that is, to exhibit nothing but truth, nothing, in regard to the Lady it addresses, equal to the acknowledged dignity of her character, nor to that real goodness, both of understanding and heart, which hath set her at the head of the Irish charities.

On a very distant hint, thrown out some time ago, that I intended thus to address you, hardly ever have you since ceased to object the impropriety of that intention; to give every reason against it, that ingenuity could suggest; or to propose other persons, more able, in your opinion, to patronise my work, and promote the Charity, in aid whereof the profits are appropriated. In adhering to my own resolution, without your permission, and even under your disapprobation, I have acted a more disinterested part, than I could have acted, had I addressed myself to any person of

high station or power. You, Madam, are wholly unable to advance me in the world, unable to confer on me any favour, but that which you have already conferred by your activity and success in forwarding this last edition of my poor performances, which, probably, without your assistance, should have been stifled by the too prevailing coldness, both to charity and religion.

It was, however, your concern for the Magdalens, rather than any regard you could have had for my works, that procured this assistance. As I am not wholly void of tenderness for the dangers or distresses of my fellow-creatures, I now return you my most humble and grateful acknowledgments for your interposition, as sincerely as if you had lent it only to serve my private views. I have sought your protection, not against the critics, whom I gratify in the following works with innumerable defects; nor against the enemies of my religion, who have torn, and will again tear me to pieces, for my defence of old unfashionable principles; principles, however, by which the good Christian, and the fine gentlewoman, have been brought to coincide in your Ladyship. If their effects are so admired in you, why should not the defence of them be tolerated in me? Undoubtedly because I cannot make them so pleasing in theory, as your Ladyship does in practice. Your apology for, and panegyric on, Christianity, is of infinitely more force, than all the writings of either sort, published since the ceasing of inspiration and miracles. How can the admirer of Lady Arbella Denny be an infidel?

As to my writings, which if not overlaid in their infancy, have, I believe, stamina naturally strong enough to promise utility in length of days; a time may come, indeed I fear is coming, when the humours of mankind, in regard to religion, shall undergo a revolution under the chastising hand of Providence; and then the defects of these volumes are likely to be overlooked for the genuineness both of the principles and motives, to which they owe their production. If at that time, Madam, they happen to be taken down from the dusty corner of some library, left unburnt, they shall tell the reader, that Lady Arbella Denny was a REAL CHRISTIAN; than which, invention and adulation can say no more on quarries of marble, or mines of brass: that, descended from

ancestors ennobled six hundred years ago, left a widow and childless, when young, with a very large income, she adhered to her state of viduity, in order to a more free application of herself, her time, and fortune, solely to works of piety and charity; that, while she supported herself with a dignity, becoming her high rank and family, her house, by a regular course of devotion, of reading and conversation on religious subjects, was turned into a house of God, where his praises were sung, not only with vocal and instrumental music, but with the music of the heart; that her devotions were not less warm, than her conversation was rational, easy, cheerful, and entertaining, for religion in her was the most distant thing in the world from dryness and insipidity; that when she read the Scriptures, their sense and spirit broke forth with a lustre, not perceptible in the ablest commentaries; that, from thus making religion habitual, domestic, and lovely, to all who partook these exercises with her, she went out into the world with the ardour of a saint to the relief of her Maker's image in all its variety of distress, and searched it out in that obscurity, wherewith poverty and a culpable modesty had concealed it; that, at the Foundling-hospital particularly, she put a stop to barbarity, and murder, saved the lives of thousands, and sent them out from thence into society, duly instructed in the principles of religion, and trained to useful industry; that she formed a Magdalen hospital in Dublin, and, in a short space of time, for such an undertaking, by labours, which scarcely the strongest man could have supported, brought it to a considerable degree of maturity, and lived to see the miserable victims of vice and wickedness reclaimed; and from instruments of the great deceiver, turned into happy examples of virtue, to encourage the conversion and hopes of other transgressors; that she rather applied for, than solicited the contributions, necessary to these expensive works, so high ran the veneration, paid to her uncommon understanding and goodness, by the king, the queen, and all ranks of people, who, with one voice, called her to the superintendence of these charities, each of them, as conducted by her wisdom, and continual attention, sufficient to do honour, not to a single person only, but to a whole nation.

For my veracity in every thing I have said, a populous

city and nation, not excepting the hard-hearted, the uncharitable, and the envious, shall be vouchers. I can safely challenge the worst of human beings to assign one instance, wherein her Ladyship, on any call of trouble, distress, or dissension among her acquaintances, hath not done her utmost to administer relief, or procure redress. Let the malicious say, if they can, that her attempts of this kind, whether prosperous or unsuccessful, were not conducted with a just mixture of warmth and prudence, with a hand, equally powerful and lenient. Let them prove to us, that in few other places, but the Foundling-hospital, she hath adopted the child, which its own father had discarded, and the mother who bore it had abandoned. Again, I challenge the seducer of women to say, whether her charity to the unhappy object of his criminal desires, hath not infinitely exceeded all the transports of fondness, by him pretended, in his too successful attempts to corrupt. I should be glad, as one inquisitive after curiosities, to hear her character from that monster, in his moment of thought, if he ever thinks, who having seduced a poor young creature, and then turned her out to infamy, prostitution, and a broken heart, sees this creature taken out of the sink in which he plunged her, washed, fed, clothed, sheltered against the severities of a harsh climate, and of a yet harsher world; and by all these means, with every inducement to repentance and virtue, led upward by her Ladyship to pardon and peace with God. Could he see, in their full lights, his arts of seduction, and Lady Arbella's of reformation, employed on the same pitiable object, how should he stand astonished at this lady, as at an angel of light, and at himself, as one of darkness! If truth itself can force, as here it must, in the basest breast, a very high degree of veneration for goodness so nobly exerted, what sentiments for that goodness must it excite in minds like hers?

To God, to you, Madam, and to the Magdalen charity, I humbly dedicate these volumes, and beg pardon for this intrusion, whereby I hope to do more good among the wealthy, who have it in their power to emulate the virtues, and share the glory, of a life spent like yours, than by the most elaborate discourses on piety and charity. Could they be made sensible how great your happiness is even here, and how firmly founded your hopes are of infinitely greater hereafter,

they would surely, at least some of them, go over from the paths of folly, dissipation, disappointment (I might say worse), to yours, where true pleasure and peace are tasted at every step.

From these sort of reflections, which, I am sensible, give you pain, and every thing tending to perpetuate your own reputation, as from trifles, your attention is drawn upward to his praises, who gave you this will and power to do good. Go on, Madam, among your choir of converted sinners, and of orphans saved from a double death, to adore and magnify the Saviour of you and them, who hath promised you the band of heaven as assistants in the joyful concert.

The cold reader will say, I have exceeded, and the warm one will be as apt to think, I have fallen short, on the subject of this address; but I insist, I have adhered scrupulously to the truth; and the inhabitants of both hospitals shall prove it on that great occasion, when truth only shall prevail. Until then

Madam,

With the Magdalens and Foundlings,

I am, and shall be,

Your Ladyship's most grateful,

Most devoted,

And most obedient humble servant,

PHILIP SKELTON.

Fintona, June 7, 1770.

PREFACE.

READER,

ALTHOUGH, generally speaking, a preface is deservedly considered as no more than a buttress to the front of a tottering building, which, if skilfully managed, may assume in some measure the air of a portico; yet as on this occasion, there are a few preliminary notices which you ought to be apprized of, give me leave to lay them before you here, at the entrance. If you begin with these, and do not, according to the preposterous custom of some readers, who always make a book the introduction to its preface, defer it till you have read the performance it is prefixed to; it may happen to save you the trouble of perusing the book itself: for, to be plain with you, the following Dialogues are neither as to the matter nor manner, planned on the taste of the present times. If you read merely for amusement, this work being only in some places, and chiefly towards the latter end, calculated for that purpose, you must be in part, disappointed. If you are one of those grave and solid readers, whom nothing can please but a close and well-connected chain of cool reasoning, it will be but an act of justice to let you know in time, that the characters introduced by the present work, are supported, as is usual in conversation and debate, with some strokes of a lower faculty than that of reason. If your end in reading, is only to confirm you in your own opinions, be advised not to meddle with these Dialogues; in which the disputants on both sides, do their utmost to overturn the principles of their adversaries. If you do not care to be roused from a pleasing slumber over long-indulged opinions, or a yet more favourite course of life accommodated to those opinions, stop here; for the very foundations of your sentiments about religion, be they what they will, are, in the following performance, examined with a severity and impartiality not very usual in writings of this kind. For instance; in case you are inviolably pre-engaged to the religion of your country, the arguments here

urged home in their utmost force by its opposers, will shock you not a little: or, in case you are settled in libertine and deistical principles, the person who here assaults those principles with the weapons of revelation, may happen to give you some disturbance.

Was there ever so odd a prefacer! you will say, who labours to dissuade his reader from the perusal of a book, written, or at least published, by himself? Be patient, and hear me out. I do not mean to bar up your way to the book by this preface, unless you are reducible to some one or other of the foregoing classes: if you are, I, who am at present better acquainted with these Dialogues than you, know full well, they will neither be pleasing nor profitable to you. But, provided you are one who honestly prefers the truth to all things; and if, in order to get a thorough view of it, you are willing to submit your opinions, preconceptions, or principles, to a re-examination; or, in case you are as yet under no engagement to any set of sentiments about religious matters; you, and the book I introduce to you, are well enough qualified to pass a few hours together; so well, indeed, that, I promise you, such a conversation will not be altogether disagreeable or unprofitable to you.

Although no one hath a worse talent at compliments than your humble servant, yet I will take it for granted, you have sat down to read this book, in quest of truth, and in order to a little information. If I do you justice in this, do not wrong yourself by turning critic; examine closely into the reasonings, that you may judge of their strength; and weigh the reflections, in order to find out whether they are just and useful: but as to censures on the mere conduct of the work and its style, consider them as impertinent and beside your purpose. If a physician should visit you in your sickness, you would not, I suppose, instead of listening attentively to his directions, fall to making remarks on the impropriety or rusticity of his expressions. This is not said because the author is in any pain to prevent your criticising his book, in case you read only to refute. That liberty he hath taken with others of freely judging, objecting, answering, you, and all the world are most heartily welcome to use, in its utmost extent, with him. Neither do I hereby intimate the least apprehension in him at the effects of that

ruffle he may possibly excite in your temper: your passion will not at all discompose him, if, upon looking into his performance, you should think fit to shew some resentment at seeing your principles baffled, or your practices exposed. He writes for truth with a freedom becoming so noble a cause, and he lashes the low dissembler, who, pretending to do the same, hath recourse to double-dealing, to imposture, and hypocrisy, with an indignation felt by every honest man at the sight of a detected thief or sharper. In case, therefore, you should be piqued, keep your chagrin to yourself, and be revenged as secretly as you can; for, by discovering your uneasiness, you will but class yourself with a set of men, who make as despicable a figure in the eyes of all honest and discerning persons, as they do in the censures of this writer. He sees farther into the defects of his own performance than you can do, unless you will give as much attention to it as he hath done, which is neither to be supposed nor expected. He foresees you will, on some occasions, be dissatisfied with his reasonings, cloyed with his repetitions, tired with the length of his harangues, disgusted at the bluntness of his style, and perhaps offended at his putting so many arguments into the mouth of him who opposes your own opinions. As to his reasoning weakly on some occasions, you ought not to be displeased with him for it, because he did his best. Neither will you, it is hoped, be severe on his repetitions, when you find that the defence of Deism in one part of his work, and that of Christianity in the other, forced him sometimes to handle the same topic in both; and that he was often obliged to give the same answer to several objections, either because they did not admit of any so good, or because none so good occurred to him. Besides, you are sensible that, in dialogue, the speakers cannot so properly refer, as in a regular treatise, to what was formerly urged, but not granted; and are therefore frequently obliged to recall the same arguments, as it always happens, in every extemporary debate. He hath on set purpose made the speeches sometimes run out into a greater length than those of Plato and Lucian: had he done otherwise, the frequent interruptions and rejoinders must, in the midst of so much matter and so many topics, have spun out the work to such a prolixity, as seemed too great a trespass on your

time and patience. You will ask, Why then did he write in dialogue? He will answer, That he chose that manner of performance for your entertainment; and will thank you, if you do not ask, Why he wrote at all? As to his giving him, who holds the contrary side of the question to yours, leave to say so much, he hath no other apology to make, but his having taken it for granted, that whoever writes for truth, writes for you; and you know, Sir, truth is not likely to be fairly weighed, when all the arguments are thrown into one scale. Thus much I thought proper to say to you, in case you should look into this book with a design to snarl.

But as I rather hope you intend to read with a disposition more conformable to that which gave birth to the following Dialogues, I shall consider you only in that view, and speak to you as a sincere lover of truth; than which, there is nothing you or I have ever heard of, better worth inquiring after, especially in relation to religion. Nothing, therefore, can be more unpardonable than a neglect, and nothing more absurd than a wrong management, of this inquiry: yet the bulk of mankind give themselves little or no trouble about the matter. The fashion of a man's clothes, the menage of his horse, or the making his dog, often cost him as much money, and more care or pains, than the choice of his principles: yet there are some who look for truth with a sincere and hearty affection, but do it under a bias, unperceived and unfelt by themselves; and therefore, notwithstanding the goodness of their intentions, like persons whose eyes are muffled, go wide of what they search for. Some are afraid their own opinions should, upon a close and candid scrutiny, appear to be ill-grounded; and so, in consequence of this unmanly apprehension, pass their days in a secret scepticism, covered with the mask of bigotry, through which they now and then warily peep askew at the opposite opinions and arguments, as children do at fruit they are forbidden to touch; their curiosity being checked by their fears, and their love of truth repressed by a greater fondness for prejudices, long ago espoused, of which, however, they are a little jealous. Some, on the contrary, do indeed dispute and read with a show of much freedom, but, withal, under the influence of a strong desire or wish to find their own opinions true; which adds as much weight to weak argu-

ments on their own side of the question, as it takes off from strong ones on the other. Lastly, There are many able controvertists, and men of renown in disputation, who pursue, not truth, but interested views; such as the profits arising from a very vendible book, or from lucrative principles, which they wed, more for the dowry entailed on them, than for their beauty and merit; or the glory of well-managed debates, of peculiar systems, and of new and surprising discoveries, calculated for no other purpose than to set the inventors at the head of new sects and parties.

From men, thus influenced, nothing is to be hoped for but nibbling or chicaning. If you, my dear reader, are of a more ingenuous turn of mind, you will be well pleased to look into a performance, wherein if more, on some occasions, is said on one side than the other, yet justice is done to both; inasmuch as fair and open dealing runs through the whole, and little or nothing is omitted, that can be justly brought in defence of either.

As for the Deists, I must observe to you, that they do not, by any means, do justice to their own cause; they do but in part support it with its own genuine arguments. They stand miserably in awe of fines; they are afraid to speak out their principles, lest they should shock or alarm. It is for these reasons, that they are forced to borrow the name and cloak of Christianity, in order to attack it; and dare seldom or never rejoin to their answerers, lest they should lose the benefit of their present concealment, from which the greater part of their success is hoped for.

On the other hand, our modern apologists for Christianity often defend it on deistical principles; and, besides, are too apt to give a new model to their own *credenda;* hoping, thereby, to gain some advantage to their cause; or, at least, to acquire the reputation of having contrived a better sort of Christianity. Among those of them who stick the closest to the old Christianity, and argue best for it, there are some, who, knowing the libertine turn of the times, are a little afraid, on their side, to deal roundly with their adversaries; and therefore assume an affected gentleness; softening the sanctions, lowering the mysteries, and relaxing the ordinances of their religion.

By these means the controversy is for ever shifting, so

that nothing is brought to an end or conclusion; and, what is still worse, the real merits on both sides are kept out of sight, being covered under a world of artifice and confusion, or whiffled away into needless debates about matters of little consequence.

To keep clear of these inconveniences, and do justice to the controversy, the writer now before you brings real Deism, and real Christianity, into the field, to confront each other: if you are a Deist, you will be well pleased to see your adversaries held to that religion which Christ and his apostles left the world: and if, from what is said in this work, reason, without higher assistance, shall appear an insufficient guide; if men may not be trusted altogether with themselves; if they cannot be their own instructors, their own legislators, their own judges; or if present considerations only are not of sufficient weight to render them virtuous; then be just to your own reason, and bid Deism a final farewell. If you are a Christian, you cannot take it amiss to see the principles of Deism truly represented, and defended with their own proper arguments; and if mysteries, and positive institutions, and the traditionary nature of the vouchers for Christianity, shall, on a fair inquiry, appear to refute the supposition of its divinity, let it fall to the ground.

Time was when the inhabitants of these countries were forced to be of whatsoever religion other people pleased; but it is the peculiar happiness of the times we live in, that every man may be of what religion he himself pleases, or of none, in case none shall please him. Let not, therefore, this author, or any other, write with greater freedom or boldness, or regard to truth, than you dare read with. If you suspect your own opinions, this alone is a sufficient reason for your attending closely to all that can be said either for or against them: if you are fully convinced of their soundness, you have nothing to fear from the most impartial examination of them: if you have been hitherto amused with an artful management of this important debate, and confounded with the sight of combatants, stealing weapons from each other, to annoy each other, so as that you could not distinguish to whom those weapons did of right belong; it will be some satisfaction to you to see, in these Dialogues, each opponent standing on his own ground, fairly covering himself with his

own shield, or striking with his own proper sword. You know, Sir, that although this controversy may for a time be managed, it can never be finally decided by policy and stratagem, but by the strength of fair and open reasoning.

After all, Sir, I am very far from conceitedly insinuating, that this dialogist is the only person who hath managed the dispute I speak of with candour; or that you may from the performance now in your hands, derive more satisfaction than from several others: for I am as sensible as any man can be, that many who have handled the same topic with the present writer, have done it, so far as they went, with equal honesty and superior ability: but I do insist, that, in general, the chief articles in debate between Deists and Christians, are not handled in so open, or so ingenuous a manner, as here; nor kept so unembarrassed with the discussion of points not necessarily connected with the decisive merits of this important question. Give me leave, therefore, to advertise you, that the present performance is intended by its author, rather as an introduction to a farther and more perfect course of reading, on the reigning controversy, than as a complete system of all that can, or ought, to be said thereon.

Ophiomaches:

OR,

DEISM REVEALED.

DIALOGUE I.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Dechaine. PARSON, a good-morning to you. Does your pretty little garden always raise you so early?

Shep. During the spring and summer it does; and at other seasons I have other things to call me up, for the most part, before five in the morning.

Dech. Mr. Templeton, be acquainted with Mr. Shepherd.—Mr. Cunningham, let me present the parson of our parish to you.

Shep. Gentlemen, I am much obliged to you for this favour. Pray will you walk into that turret, and be seated?

Dech. Here I suppose you study.

Shep. I read and sleep in the room above; and, when any body comes to see me, here we sit.

Dech. Who lives in the little house, through which we entered the garden.

Shep. It affords shelter to a poor relation, and his wife, with two servants.

Dech. I am told you yourself are still a single man. How comes it to pass that, in so long a time, you have doubled neither your person nor your chin? You don't fast and mortify surely?

Shep. It is no fault in me, that I am not married; for my circumstances are but narrow: nor is it a merit, that I am not fat; for my state of health is but indifferent.

Dech. How modest! with another you would turn all this to saintship.

Shep. No, Sir, I am as far from that species of dissimulation as yourself.

Dech. It is a long time, Shepherd, since you and I were first acquainted.

Shep. Upwards of thirty years, I believe.

Dech. I have been now three months your landlord and neighbour, and you have never been to see me. This, I think, was not kind.

Shep. Indeed, Sir, I went to your house with that design; but your servants said you were not at leisure. Had my visit been a thing of any consequence to you, I suppose they would have told you I was to pay my respects.

Dech. Methinks, however, you might have come a second time.

Shep. It is a common remark, that poor clergymen are too intruding on their wealthy neighbours. Their conduct, which in this respect is generally thought forward, and troublesome at least, is ascribed to low and unworthy motives. It was for this reason, Sir, that I thought proper to keep my distance, till you should signify a desire to see me. The gentleman from whom you purchased this estate, came every Sunday to church, while he was in the country, and generally asked me to go home with him. This hath been hitherto the custom here; and as it gave me sometimes an opportunity of seeing good company, and at the same time defended the gentleman from my visits, excepting at such seasons as were most convenient to him, I think it was a very good one.

Dech. Although I do not go so often to church as my predecessor, yet I hope my way of serving God is not the less acceptable for being less public and showy.

Shep. You mistake me, Sir; I did not intend to put you on the defence of your conduct in respect to religion; I only intended to apologize for my own, in point of civility.

Dech. Ah parson! I believe I can guess what you intended well enough; but I must tell you, the great stress laid by your order on the mere externals of religion, is of ill consequence to the thing itself, and leads your hearers to believe, that running to the church and the sacrament may atone for great defects in matters of more real importance. Besides, your particular forwardness in reproving, or say it

were only in throwing out hints like this, by which the conduct of men in station is arraigned, as it proceeds from a mistaken zeal, if not from pride, answers no other end, but to disoblige, and to render your person, and of consequence your advice and function, disagreeable. Your brethren, who know the world better, have, generally speaking, found this method so disobliging and unsuccessful, that they have been forced to lay it aside, and betake themselves to a conduct more conformable to the times. Since the ceasing of miracles, and other divine interpositions, the church, I think, can scarcely be supported by any other, than human means. You must therefore ply to the world, you must keep in with the great ones, you must cultivate their good graces, and engage their countenance and interest, or I must tell you, in a little time you will have no church at all. And take my word for it, sir, this is not to be done by reproofs and such-like freedoms, but by an insinuating and soothing behaviour, by making the duties of religion easy and agreeable, by shaping those and your own carriage to the politeness and freedom of the times you live in.

Shep. As to the duties of religion, it is not in my power to change the shape of them, and I think them agreeable enough to well-disposed persons, as our Saviour and his apostles left them. As to my own carriage, I do not pretend to justify it. All I can say is, that I must speak the truth on pain of my own eternal ruin; and I do not take myself to be any farther answerable for the effect, than as I may happen to hinder it by an improper manner of addressing myself to those with whom I have to do. Now, in that respect, I endeavour to discharge my duty with all the little prudence and conduct I am master of. When I have not the success I could wish, although I am very apt to blame my own weakness for it; yet I cannot help thinking it in some measure owing to the disinclination of those whom I speak to. You, sir, I believe, will own I have not yet attacked you in a very rude or shocking style.

Cunn. The style indeed was not uncivil; but your hint was, I think, a little early in a conversation but just commenced.

Dech. It was not altogether on account of Mr. Shepherd's insinuation about my not going to church that I

took the liberty of offering my mite of advice, but because I find he is censured by many people, and even by some of the clergy, for too much boldness and freedom with men of power, in what he takes to be his duty of reproving; and the idea of his temper, which remains upon my memory, since our acquaintance in the college, made me think a little advice, tending to soften his conduct in this article, not altogether unnecessary.

Cunn. So far from it, that, if I mistake not, he who knows the temper of the age we live in, must be sensible the church, and the interests of the clergy, are not to be supported, as you just now hinted, but by being well with the great.

Shep. That may be; and yet, if I am guilty of the imprudence charged on me, the advice that hath been given me is better intended, than applied. But I hope, sir, I need not prove to you, if you are a clergyman, that the church of Christ hath promises from Scripture of more than human assistance; nor need I remind you, that it gained ground and prevailed in opposition to all the policy and power of greater persons, than the minister of this parish hath occasion to disoblige.

Dech. It prevailed indeed, as you say; but, upon recollection, you will find it did not gain ground, no not a foot of ground, until it had gained the great ones to its party.

Shep. The church lands then, and the wealth of the clergy, are what you mean by the church; and in that sense of the word perhaps you may reason justly; but I mean by it, the whole body of Christians, united in one society, for the preservation of Christian principles, and the practice of Christian duties. Now the church, taken in this sense, is never more in danger of ruin, than when its clergy sacrifice the interests and great ends of their function to worldly views; when they mince and qualify their doctrines to the palate or pride of their hearers; and when people, impatient of all restraints, and averse to plain and salutary truths, do all they can to keep them at a distance from their consciences. If the clergy are to consider themselves as God's ambassadors, they will speak freely; and, if the people look upon them as such, they will receive their messages with some degree of respect, or decency at least.

Temp. God's ambassadors! I thought Lord Shaftsbury had so fully exposed their spiritual excellencies on this claim of honour, that none of them would ever have talked in that strain any more.

Dech. They do still assume that style in country congregations; but I believe Mr. Shepherd is singular in using it to such people as us. Ah Shepherd! Shepherd! I remember when we were in college together, I prophesied concerning your future fortunes. Did I not tell you then, boy as I was, and little acquainted with the world, that your warm temper, and high notions, bordering on enthusiasm, would never do, when reduced to practice; that you would make enemies to yourself, instead of friends to the church; that you would be always poor and despised, and live, if not die, a martyr to your airy notions? And was I not too true a prophet? Could Isaiah himself have predicted a chain of future events more exactly? Your liberty of speech hath offended those among the laity, who could have served you, and even given umbrage to the bishops.

Shep. And did I not prophesy too? Did I not tell you, I should be very indifferent about those events, and postpone all such considerations to the discharge of my duty, if God should ever think fit to admit me into the sacred office, which I have now the honour to fill?

Dech. And so you would not accept of a fat deanery or bishopric? A likely thing indeed!

Shep. You never heard me say so. I would be glad to take a better benefice than the one I am now possessed of, if it were offered me; but this does not hinder me from living contented on my present income of four-and-thirty pounds a year, and my little farm, from which I draw near as much more.

Dech. The same turn of mind runs through all the clergy. They are a mighty spiritual sort of men; yet they grasp at all the temporalities they can lay their hands on. Why, Shepherd, you are a mere pope, or German bishop, in miniature! While one part of you is soaring in sermons, psalms, and prayer; the other, and that the larger, is grovelling in the earth, and growing to this naughty world, which you would persuade us to be so much out of humour with. The farmer shews the parson is not

altogether satisfied with his condition. You are just as discontented as any other man in like circumstances; but the pride of your heart, which will not let you stoop, will never suffer you to climb. You aim at wealth and greatness, like the rest of your tribe; but be assured, digging and grumbling never made a great man yet.

Shep. And I know they never will. In the mean time I do neither; nor have I any talent at those more successful arts of rising you recommend to me, than which nothing can be more foreign to my purpose; for I thank God, my desires are as low as my circumstances. Pray Mr. Dechaine, are you ever uneasy because you are not a king?

Dech. No indeed; I never was once disturbed by so wild a thought.

Shep. Nor I, by any expectation so chimerical, as that of better provision in the church, after having behaved myself in such a manner, that, unless mankind were made over again, I could have no reason to entertain such hopes. I eat, drink, sleep, and dress, to all reasonable intents and purposes, as well as you do; and what more should one desire? I have no family to provide for. I have none of those anxieties, not to say remorses, that attend the making, managing, or spending, a great fortune. In a word, I have found by sweet experience, that there is no difference between a great and a moderate income, but what is either in favour of the latter, or else arises wholly from a perverted imagination.

Dech. The old man still! I tell thee, Shepherd, I am far from believing there is any thing more than grimace and hypocrisy, in all you have been saying on this subject these thirty years past. It is true I heard a very great clergyman, since I came into the country, do you the honour to compare you to cardinal Spada, who, while the Reformation was going on briskly in Switzerland, went thither, and engaged in warm disputes with Protestants, in hopes they would put him to death for his religion; but, to his great disappointment, found them a very peaceable and well-conditioned people. This reflection sprung from some instances that had been given in company of your flaming zeal against the prevailing opinions of the times. However, I no more believed you was seeking for the crown of martyrdom, than I

did, that his reverence, who entertained us with this sneer at your expense, would snatch it from you, and put it on his own bacon-head. I believe I understand you better. As you have no friends, you scheme upon the idle reputation of great zeal, disinterestedness, and merit, in hopes by those means to force some bishop to provide for you. But the bishops know too well how to unriddle such a conduct, and form very different notions of your merit, from those erected in that proud breast of yours. Nothing on earth can be more airy and whimsical, than hopes founded on a scheme like this, which I think the woful experience of twenty years might by this time have put you out of humour with. Be advised by a friend to enter even yet, for perhaps it may not be too late, upon a more prudent course. Give a more genteel cut to your principles, at least to your professions. Be more obsequious to men in power. Endeavour to wriggle yourself in with their favourites, and do not neglect to cultivate even their servants. Let the bishops have your attendance. Pay them the court they expect. Be always a conformist to the company you are in. Let the principles or practices of your acquaintances, especially your great acquaintances, point which way they will, be sure you go along; for no good, no reformation of them, nor promotion f yourself, is to be expected from contradiction and opposition.

Shep. I hope promotion in the church is not to be obtained by such arts as these; and as to the bishops, I have no reason to think so meanly of them, as to hope, that any court I could pay them, would induce them to prefer me to more deserving objects of their favour. Although the times are such, that it is not to be supposed, report is kinder to them than they deserve, yet I question, whether at any time since the establishment of our church, that order stood higher in the just esteem of all who are competent judges of either their abilities or behaviour. This alone is sufficient to prevent in me the least hope of their regard, at least of obtaining it by such means as you recommend, which they have too much sense not to see through, and I too little address and obsequiousness to employ.

Dech. Be always poor and despicable then. There are some men of so unhappy a make, and cast in a mould so uncouth, and cross to all the courses of the world, that unless

the world will bend to them, their advancement in it is impossible. A person of this stamp is always in the wrong, and therefore always unsuccessful in every thing he undertakes.

Shep. How much more happy is he, who is so framed by nature, and prepared by art, as to be always in the right, who never errs in his reasonings, nor fails in his schemes! Nothing about such a person as this can go wrong. His very watch partakes of the infallibility of its owner, and is always in the right.

Dech. If your hint is intended for me, give me leave to say, I think the reputation and fortune, to which I have raised myself by acting on maxims quite opposite to yours, shew in good earnest, I have been much oftener in the right than your reverence, and that to much better purpose.

Shep. Not unless you have also raised yourself to higher contentment than mine.

Dech. Contentment! Do you think an estate of four thousand a-year, great reputation and business at the bar, and an honourable place at court, can afford a man nothing above contentment? I have laboured for the wind indeed, if that only felicity of beggars is all I can extract from such ample means. Take my word for it, parson, my fortune affords me pleasures, to which a fat capon at a christening, the highest delight you know, is not to be compared.

Shep. My ignorance of them makes me satisfied without them, and I shall take your own word for it, that you are happy enough, provided you have preserved the conscience and character of an honest man, which is not always the case with those who have amassed vast fortunes in the space of a few years.

Dech. As to my reputation, I can appeal to my business for the most solid kind of voucher in its favour. People of high rank, and good understanding, do not usually trust their fortunes to lawyers of small reputation. As to my conscience, the late Mr. Templeton, father to this young gentleman here, left him at the age of fifteen, with an estate of five thousand a-year, and upwards of fifty thousand pounds in money, to my care; and no one can say, I have not discharged this important trust like a man of honour. I have improved his fortune; I have given him a polite education;

and I have bred him a defensive lawyer, insomuch that it will hereafter be in his power, at least to preserve what he has.

Shep. You forget to tell us with what principles you formed his mind, that being, in my opinion, a matter of far greater consequence to him, than all his wealth, law, and politeness.

Dech. What if I instilled no principles into him at all; but only endeavoured to root out those he had before?

Shep. Provided they were bad ones, you did one half of what a good friend should do.

Dech. They were such as a sorry parson, and two or three nursery-maids, thought fit to obtrude upon an ingenuous nature, that needed no instruction.

Shep. It may be, the principles were good for all that. You say you gave him a polite education; did you not, among other things, take care to have him well instructed in music, dancing, and riding the great horse?

Dech. I did.

Shep. His mind must be of a very different make from the minds of other men, if it did not require to be taught certain internal sciences, analagous to those, and infinitely more ornamental, as well as useful. Pray Mr. Templeton have you read Lord Shaftsbury's Characteristics?

Temp. Yes, sir; and think them very fine performances.

Shep. I guessed as much by your quoting him a little while ago. You do not forget, I suppose, what he says concerning 'the internal music and harmony of affections.'

Temp. He speaks incomparably on that, as well as all other topics.

Shep. Does he not take the gross of mankind to be void of that harmony, and that grace of moral action, resulting from it.

Temp. I think he does.

Shep. And does he not endeavour to remedy this great defect in his readers?

Temp. He does.

Dech. Ay, and it was in order to give the young mind of my ward a happy and graceful turn, that I put Lord Shaftsbury's works into his hands, as soon as ever he came under my care; and directed Mr. Cunningham, who was his tutor,

to impress the notions of that incomparable writer as strongly on his mind as possible.

Shep. If they were better fitted to answer that end than the principles he had imbibed in the nursery, you did very well: but it seems, I misunderstood you; for I thought your whole endeavour, on the article of his education, had been to root out the principles of the nursery from a nature so ingenuous as to need no instruction, and not to instil principles of any kind.

Dech. Lord Shaftsbury hath an admirable hand at rooting out the exotic weeds of a wrong education, which is in my opinion the only work of education worth labouring in; for, as soon as they are removed, the beautiful and wholesome plant of virtue, which is natural to the soil, shoots up without any farther culture, and quickly comes to maturity.

Shep. It is very well. Every thing, I find, may be taught, but Christianity; and all that is said against instructions in general, is levelled only against Christian instruction. And pray, Mr. Cunningham, did you not sometimes think it an odd employment in a parson to eradicate from the mind of your pupil the principles of God's word, and to implant, in the place of them, a system of Deism?

Cunn. What if I did not look on the principles I found in him, as derived from the word of God, but rather from the superstition of an ignorant clergyman, and two or three silly women? And what if I think Lord Shaftsbury, who was a man of candour and honour, sincere in his frequent professions of Christianity?

Shep. Be so good, Mr. Templeton, as to let us know whether the substance of what you was taught in the nursery, is not contained in the Catechism of the Church of England, and whether you was not made to get the catechism itself by rote.

Dech. There is no need of catechising at present either Mr. Templeton or his tutor. As to the latter, at whom I perceive you are striking in this sly inquiry of yours. I take him to be full as sound a Christian as yourself, without any of that stiffness, sourness, or formality, that render your sort of Christianity so troublesome to yourself and others. You do not care for him perhaps, because you may have heard he was educated at Glasgow, where, if we may judge

by those who come from thence, the minds of young persons are formed to a much more open and liberal turn, than in the universities of England. The good effects of his education appear in his behaviour, which is humane and prudent. I do believe he hath not a single enemy upon the face of the earth. He hath many and powerful friends, and hath already tasted the fruits of his own merit, and their attachment to him, in two rich benefices, which he is now in the enjoyment of. Nay, I think I may assure him, his rise in the world is not yet at its meridian.

Cunn. You are always very good, sir; and I shall have more merit a great deal, than I dare think myself possessed of, if I can deserve the smallest part of your favours. While I am so happy as to be well with such persons as you, I have enough to comfort and defend me against the envy of lower people.

Dech. I have been, I know not how, diverted from mentioning to Mr. Shepherd the occasion of our visit. Pray, parson, do you often hold forth to your plain congregation on such topics as employed you last Sunday?

Shep. Very seldom, sir.

Dech. Why, so I thought. It was then, I suppose, to honour us on our first appearance in your church, that you chose to be so refined.

Shep. It was not with a view to do you any honour, that I preached as I did, but to lay before you some reasonings which I judged proper for your consideration.

Dech. And why proper for our consideration, I pray you? Had any body told you we were libertines or Deists?

Shep. I have indeed heard it said, that you are but too inclinable to Deism, and that you have brought Mr. Templeton partly into your own sentiments about religion. I was the more confirmed in my fears, that it might be so, by your not coming to church, and by what hath been lately whispered about the neighbourhood concerning an odd sort of industry, said to be used by you, in propagating loose principles among our country gentleman over a bottle, both at your own, and some of your neighbours' houses. These things laid together, gave me occasion to recollect, that, when we studied at Oxford, you even then began to discover the seeds of libertinism, particularly by speaking slightingly

of several matters in the Scriptural history; and I remember, one day, more especially, you undertook to prove, that the theatre was by far a more magnificent and sumptuous building, than the temple of Solomon.

Dech. I am not much surprised, that your country-people, who are but an ignorant and clumsy sort of folks, cannot tell how to distinguish between one's talking freely on certain points of religion, purely for the sake of speculation and exercise, and making a solemn confession of one's faith by a creed; but the ingenious Mr. Shepherd, who had his education in a place where every thing is disputed, amazes me, when I hear him recollecting the remarks of a boy, to confirm those of his ignorant neighbours, upon a liberty, which we cannot be deprived of, without sinking immediately into barbarism.

Shep. There is the more occasion, you see, for those who desire to be thought Christians, to take care how they speak, in the hearing of such people as us.

Dech. It is of no consequence what opinion squire this one, and parson t'other one, entertains of one's principles, unless principles are assumed for shew and parade. But, supposing I was really a Deist, could you have the vanity to hope, that, by slipping your fierce triple-headed Cerberus of a sermon at me, you might bark or worry me out of my way of thinking? Indeed, doctor, the sermons of your clergy have but little weight with people of any tolerable taste or understanding. The brute thunders of the pulpit can neither hurt nor frighten any but the vulgar.

Shep. I never intended to frighten, much less to hurt any body, by my sermons; and in that particularly which, it seems, you have taken offence at, I am sure there was nothing, that could either hurt or terrify those for whose use it was designed.

Dech. That is very true, and I am sure there was as little that could convince. It could have no effect any way, but to satisfy the understanding part of your audience, that the parson was a weak man; and had you been modest enough to think so before you preached it, you might have saved yourself the trouble of an impertinent harangue, that kept you about forty minutes longer from your beef and pudding, than there was any sort of occasion for.

Shep. Yet, as long as I am convinced I was doing my duty, nothing you can say, even though it were, if possible, more genteel and witty, than your jest about beef and pudding, shall make me wish it undone.

Dech. Bless us! how polite we shall grow under the corrections of a country parson! But enough of this. Do you really think you could support the positions you undertook to prove in that sermon, now that you are out of the pulpit, and one may have word about with you?

Shep. I think I can, and will very readily undertake it, provided you will promise to moderate the keenness of your wit a little, and enter on the point with somewhat less contempt for the reasonings of a man so far below you in circumstances. If we do not contend for a mere triumph, but seriously set ourselves to search for truth, reason, even from me, will have its full weight with you; and I shall readily submit on my side, as soon as ever reason shews itself on yours.

Dech. Agreed, agreed; do you however take your own way of arguing; and don't pretend to tie me to it, because I am free to use mine.

Shep. With all my heart.

Dech. If I forget not, the chief positions, on which the rest of your discourse depended, were these: 1st, 'That the evidence of possible facts, said to be done in ages long since past, is matter of faith. 2dly, That he who denies such facts to have been done, can found his dissent on nothing else but faith. And, 3dly, That, of consequence, he who denies the historical part of the Christian religion, the facts of which are all possible, cannot be sure it is false, can only believe it to be so.' Do I rightly represent the points you endeavoured to prove, and afterward to draw conclusions from, in your sermon?

Shep. You do, sir, in the fairest manner.

Dech. These doctrines were new and surprising to me. But before I enter upon the discussion of points, that may possibly carry us out into some length of debate, give me leave to premise, that although I frequently may have occasion to serve myself with the arguments and expressions of a Deist, you are only to consider me as personating a man of deistical principles merely for argumentation's sake; and

let me at the same time assure you, sir, that I am sincerely a Christian.

Shep. May I then speak to you, without offence, as if it were to a professed Deist, provided I understand you to be no more than arguing, merely for speculation, in the character and mask of a Deist?

Dech. You may; and I in return will consider you as arguing, merely for your bread, in the character and mask of a Christian.

Shep. Well, that will shew a kind of benevolence in you as human and tender, as if it had sprung from the heart and pen of a Shaftsbury himself. Be pleased to proceed.

Dech. As to your first proposition, namely, that 'the evidence of possible facts, said to be done in ages long since past, is matter of faith,' I readily grant it. We can only believe such facts, they being in themselves neither self-evident nor demonstrable. But, before we go any farther, it will be proper to observe to you, that as faith is the lowest and weakest among the three degrees of assent, so it is that only, and no more, that can be afforded to Christianity.

Shep. It is very true. But as a demonstration, which, in the order and progress of knowledge, follows from, and depends on, self-evidence, if it is once fully and fairly made out, justly claims as entire an assent, as self-evidence itself; so there are, in some cases, certain degrees of report and credibility, to which an assent, as full and entire, is given by all men, as to the most self-evident or demonstrable propositions.

Dech. Pray, sir, will you favour me with an instance or two?

Shep. Were you ever at Constantinople, sir?

Dech. Never.

Shep. Yet I believe you have no more doubt there is such a city, than that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones.

Temp. I am sure I have not.

Dech. Nor I; but what then?

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, did you see Julius Cæsar assassinated in the Capitol?

Dech. A pretty question! No, indeed, sir.

Shep. Have you any doubts about the truth of what is told us by the historians concerning that memorable transaction?

Dech. Not the least.

Shep. Pray, is it either self-evident or demonstrable to you, at this time and place, that there is any such city as Constantinople, or that there ever was such a man as Cæsar?

Dech. By no means.

Shep. And you have all you know, concerning the being of either the city, or the man, merely from the report of others, who had it from others, and so on, through many links of tradition?

Dech. I have.

Shep. You see then, that there are certain cases, in which 'the evidence of things not seen,' nor neither sensibly or demonstrably perceived, can justly challenge so entire an assent, that he who should pretend to refuse it in the fullest measure of acquiescence, would be deservedly esteemed the most stupid or perverse of mankind.

Dech. Suppose I should, to shorten our work, grant you all this; are you so weak as to imagine you can put facts related in the four Gospels, or any of them, for instance the resurrection of Jesus, on the same footing of authority and evidence, with the assassination of Cæsar?

Shep. If I cannot put it on a higher and firmer foundation, I ill deserve the pay and livery of my Master. Let us, however, for the present, keep close to the method prescribed to us by the three propositions, cited from my discourse. And, as to the first, with the observation you just now introduced under it, tending to shew, that the evidence of the Christian religion is of the weakest kind, although I think I have said enough to prove that kind of evidence capable of certainty, yet I am far from being satisfied with your granting it merely to shorten our work; and shall therefore beg leave to observe to you, that the most important affairs of life are founded and transacted upon this sort of evidence. A merchant trusts all his fortune to advices from foreign countries, such as that there are cities, commodities, traders, in Turkey or China, none of which he ever saw, and

often relies on factors, with whom he is not in the least acquainted. On this bottom is built all foreign commerce, and even the greater part of our domestic trade. The civil and military lists are paid by it, and every thing you, or his lordship, or his majesty enjoys, that is better than acorns and water, are derived from it. The judge determines property, and liberty, and life, by oaths, which are only the evidence of things not seen by him; and neither he nor all the lawyers on earth can find out any other evidence, more to be depended on, for the execution of law and justice; nay, the nature of those important matters mentioned doth not, in one case among ten thousand, admit of any other evidence. The king is represented, and his power exercised, by sheriffs, justices, constables, &c. whom he never saw, and in places vastly remote; and subjects obey them so far as to surrender their goods, liberties, lives, without ever having seen either his majesty, or his commission; nay, his majesty himself never saw one among a thousand of the commissions by which his authority is delegated. From hence it may appear, that wealth, liberty, property, life, peace, and society, depend almost wholly on faith; and that kings, judges, merchants, the wisest of men, as well as the weakest, are obliged to see with other people's eyes, to hear with other people's ears, to judge by other people's reason, and to act by other people's hands, over the face of the whole earth, and in matters of the last consequence.

Dech. And are they not often deceived by trusting to imperfect lights, by confiding in other people's eyes and judgments?

Shep. They are indeed; but I think not oftener than by trusting too confidently to their own. The purblind man must see for himself; the half-witted wretch must judge for himself; those who can see very well, must take upon them to distinguish objects that lie beyond the verge of sight; and they who can judge well enough in some things, will take upon them to canvass and decide such others as are above human comprehension and reason. This proceeds from pride; and what is the consequence? Why, an infinity of errors in matters of sense, and of strict and undeniable demonstrations that are really false.

Temp. The doctor hath struck out a beautiful field for thought, entirely new to me.

Shep. And yet, sir, one would think there is scarcely a day in which the common affairs of life might not suggest it to one.

Temp. It is very true, and I now wonder how it could escape me. So it fares with the proofs for the being of a God. The world is full of them; every atom of matter carries an evidence for that great truth; and yet I know not but an ordinary eye might gaze for a long time on the sun, an animal, or a tree, without tracing the connexion between those works of wisdom and their author, if nobody hinted it to him.

Shep. Your observation is good, and those who had the care of your education, ought, I should think, to have taught you the strength of moral evidence long ago. They might have led you through great part of this field, as you call it, the hither side of it being open time out of mind.

Cunn. Reflections thrown upon his education, now that he is full five-and-twenty, and can think for himself, turn to flouts upon him, rather than his tutor.

Temp. If there was a flout intended, I believe it was not for me; however, I wish the appearance of it had been avoided.

Shep. All I intended, sir, was to shew you by that instance, that, notwithstanding all the boasts I have heard of the open and candid education you have got, certain notices of the greatest consequence may have been industriously kept out of your sight, and, with the same intention, others, as prejudicial, thrown in your way. This hint, which, for ought I can see to the contrary, may be very necessary to you, neither Mr. Dechaine's two great estates, nor Mr. Cunningham's two fat parishes, high as they set them above me, can hinder me from repeating to you, because I have some reason to think it concerns your happiness in this world and the next.

Dech. We are obliged to believe your duty forces you to be rude, and so must bear with you the best we can. But let us return to your second proposition; which was this, 'That he who denies such possible facts as are said to have

been done in ages long since past, can found his dissent on nothing else but faith.'

Shep. I hope that point will not detain us long, because I think it seems to be almost evident in itself.

Dech. To me I am sure it appears exceedingly strange. I thought faith had been the very reverse of disbelieving; that it had consisted in actually and positively believing; and that he who hath not faith, is called in Scripture, and by all the world, an unbeliever.

Shep. That is but playing with words. Are there not four kinds of evidence; and corresponding with them, four kinds or degrees of assent?

Dech. There are; namely, self-evidence, demonstration, probability, and credibility: and the assent given to the first, is intuition; to the second, knowledge; to the third, opinion; and to the fourth, belief.

Shep. Do you intuitively perceive, that possible facts, said to have been done in former ages, were not done?

Dech. No.

Shep. Can you demonstrate, that such facts were not done?

Dech. Not unless there were other facts to render those impracticable and impossible.

Shep. But you cannot demonstrate, that there ever were such other facts.

Dech. It is very true.

Shep. It follows then, that you can only believe such facts were never done; for as you cannot demonstrate, so neither can you render it probable, that such facts never happened.

Dech. Not so fast, sir. The third head of your discourse was to this effect: 'In consequence of what hath been laid down in the two former propositions, he who denies the historical part of the Christian religion, the facts of which are all possible, cannot be sure it is false, can only believe it so to be.' Let me observe to you, sir, that no degree of testimony can ever prove an impossible fact to have been done; and that if the highest degree of testimony is opposed by as high a degree of improbability, the opinion founded on the one will destroy, or at least suspend, the belief that may be claimed by the other.

Shep. This I readily acknowledge.

Dech. In consequence of this, I must insist, that if some of the facts delivered in the gospel history, be impossible, or extremely improbable, this will demonstrate that history to be false, or at least put the negative faith of a Deist, if faith you will call it, on a very firm foundation.

Shep. I own it will.

Dech. To avoid prolixity then, let us fix on a single fact, among several of the same kind, and consider a little whether it be not impossible, or extremely unfeasible. If I mistake not, Jesus himself put the truth and reality of his Messiahship on his rising again from the dead; so that if he did not actually die, and rise again, he could not have been that Son and Messenger of God, he gave himself out for.

Shep. He did.

Dech. Pray now, in sober and good earnest, was that a very possible fact?

Shep. I think it was. If our Saviour had not thought so, and been sure he could perform it, he had sense enough to have put the truth of his mission on somewhat more within his power, or to avoid the leaving it to any farther trials.

Dech. For my part, that which is against nature, I shall always think impossible. The laws of the creation are stated and invariable things, and, as long as the world lasts, make such a reunion of soul and body, such a reviviscence of a dead carcase, as impossible as it is for water to burn, or fire to wet us.

Shep. They certainly do, unless the power of God, who made all things, and can alter them as he pleases, should suspend those laws, and, by a force superior to them, should compel matter to produce effects contrary to theirs. To restore a dead body to life, is at least as easy as it was to give it life at first.

Dech. But before you fly to the power of God, in order to account for such an amazing fact, you would do well to consider, whether it is consistent with the majesty of an Almighty Being, who can bring about all his purposes in a natural way, whose works do not, like those of men, need to be taken in pieces, in order to be mended, to break in upon his own scheme of creation by an act of violence, that must

plainly shew him sensible of a defect in what he had made. His works are all perfect, and the moral part, which is the most excellent of his works, being the most perfect of all, cannot be supposed to want assistance from any suspension or reversal of the natural.

Shep. Does any morality consist in the goodness or badness of actions?

Dech. It does.

Shep. And can any action be either morally good or evil, if the agent hath it not in his power to do it, or let it alone?

Dech. It cannot.

Shep. All moral actions therefore, as such, depend upon the freedom of the agent, to do that which is good or evil.

Dech. No doubt, they do.

Shep. Now man, who is a free and moral agent, may do that which is evil.

Dech. He may.

Shep. As this is the privilege of men in general, so men in general may do evil, and be wicked.

Dech. This I grant.

Shep. It follows therefore, that irregularities and defects may arise in the moral world, through an abuse of the aforementioned privilege, notwithstanding the perfection, in which this part of the creation may have been sent into being. Now to remedy these defects, if they should at any time happen, and become general, bring the means from whence you will, can be no unreasonable object of God's goodness; and we cannot, I think, without great presumption, say, either that God would not, or could not, for a time at least, suspend or reverse the laws of the material world, for so excellent a purpose, if such reversal might conduce to that purpose. Now this suspension, or reversal, is as natural, as the course of nature itself; for what is nature, but the free-will of God exerted in the works of creation? The supreme will, sir, may act as naturally, and as wisely, when at any time it inverts the common course of things, as you do, when you turn back the hand of your watch, in order to bring it nearer to the time of the day. Thus I hope it appears, that both in respect to the fact itself of the resurrec-

tion, and to God the agent, it may have been possible enough, unless it be said, that there were no defects nor corruptions in the moral world that required a reformation; or that the miracle of our Saviour's resurrection, no more than the rest of his miracles, could be judged by God to be a proper proof of the reformer's mission.

Dech. And may not this be said?

Shep. It may; but not, I think, with any shew of reason. There was wickedness enough in the world, at our Saviour's coming, to make a reformation necessary. The wisest of the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, thought so; and that the miracles, particularly the resurrection, wrought in proof of our Saviour's mission, were very strong and effectual arguments in favour of it, and therefore worthy to be employed by the Divine wisdom for that purpose, may appear evident to any one, who considers, not only the nature of the case, which to human apprehension seems incapable of any other satisfactory proofs, but also the conviction actually wrought by their means in prodigious numbers of people, who, had they not been eye-witnesses of demonstrations so irresistible, could never, by any other means, have been induced to suffer and die, as they did, for facts so hard to be believed, and for principles so irreconcilable to the corruptions of human nature.

Dech. As to the difficulty of believing such facts, you will not surely insist on that as an argument for your faith, since, in the apprehension of every sober person, it must appear an insuperable obstacle thereunto.

Shep. Ordinary facts are believed upon common report, or even slight appearances; and therefore, in respect to such, mistakes are easy and usual; but no one will become evidence for a miracle at the expense, or even risk, of his life, without the highest and strongest conviction the nature of the thing will bear.

Temp. Surely the resurrection of Christ, or any other man, cannot be a thing impossible with God. It is neither above his power, nor, when employed for a sufficient purpose, inconsistent with his majesty, wisdom, and goodness.

Dech. Well, Templeton, the parson is likely to make a very strong believer of you. He could not reasonably hope for a more forward disciple.

Temp. It is not just now that I began to think the resurrection possible.

Dech. No, I believe not. You probably thought it so, ever since you was fed with that, and other the like food for babes, in the nursery. Children suck in marvellous tales at a strange rate, and find it difficult to clear their heads of them at a riper age.

Temp. That is not my case, if I know any thing of my own mind. I think it, in itself, a very amazing fact; and, were it not well attested, should never believe it; but I must be excused, if I can see no impossibility in it, nor in any of the miracles said to have been wrought by Christ, or his apostles. What do you think, Mr. Cunningham?

Cunn. I do not think it impossible.

Shep. So much, at least, I expected from you. But what if it should, all things considered, appear highly probable?

Dech. That, I believe, you will find it hard to prove, take what you will into consideration.

Shep. If sin, universally spread, brought universal death into the world, if it was worthy of a compassionate God to send some one into the world to take away sin, if miracles were the best proof of his mission, if his own resurrection was the most convincing miracle that could be wrought, and at the same time carried with it the most experimental assurance of a happy victory over all the effects of sin, and a comfortable renovation of the moral world, and if it was as easy for God to raise up his Son from death, as it is for one man to awake another out of sleep, I think the resurrection of Christ very far removed from improbability.

Dech. Ay, very far, no doubt; but methinks you took a great many *ifs* to eke out that argument.

Shep. I intended it rather as matter for you to form arguments out of, and as an appeal to common sense, than as a regular syllogism, raised by mood and figure.

Dech. Oh! sir, you may spare yourself the trouble of furnishing me with matter.

Shep. But, sir, while you throw into one scale the improbability of certain facts related in the gospel history, and aggravate it as much as you can, give me leave to put into the other that authority, and those vouchers, on which the credibility of the facts objected to is founded, and hint a

little the weak authorities the Deists are forced to support their opposite faith with, in relation to those facts. We are all, both Christians and libertines, believers; but which side believes aright, is the point to be considered.

Dech. If it is, proceed to it.

Shep. Those believers, whose faith is to rely on the truth of the Christian history, rest their assent on a written report, made by eye witnesses; which report the various churches and sects, jealous of one another, took care to preserve genuine and uncorrupted, at least in all material points, and all the religious writers in every age since have amply attested. That the first spreaders of this report were competent witnesses can hardly be questioned, when it is considered, that, in respect to facts, they only reported what they saw; in doing which they were so far from having any interest, that they forfeited every comfort and pleasure of life, and life itself, for the sake of gaining followers to a better. In the case of ordinary facts, indifferent witnesses may suffice; but, when miracles were to be recorded, Providence, for the satisfaction of distant places and ages, gave witnesses, who embraced the terrors of death to confirm their testimony, who, if I may be allowed the expression, were sworn on their own blood to the truth of their evidence. The libertine believers, on the other hand, whose faith consists in a persuasion, that the Christian religion is an imposture, found their opinion on that of the Jews, who persecuted and crucified Christ, and on that of the Romans, who put his followers to death, by way of answer, to the doctrines they taught, and to the evidence of the facts they reported. From them only can any testimony against Christ, or his followers, be derived. Now as it is plain, from a favourite principle in libertinism, that they were prejudiced against Christianity by their persecuting it, their testimony is not to be relied on. The Jews caused our Saviour to be put to death, lest the Romans should come, and take away their place and nation. And the Romans, if they had suffered the Christian religion to spread itself, without opposition, saw they must have given up their gods, to whom they were blindly bigoted, and their vices, to which they were still more strongly attached. They therefore set themselves to refute it with fire and fagot, and thought to sub-

due it, as they had done every thing else, by force. To believe in vouchers like these, against the testimony given in favour of Christianity, is to have a strange redundancy of faith. Yet no one contemporary Jew or Roman hath left any thing on record, to invalidate the truth of our Saviour's resurrection, or the reality of any one miracle in the gospel history; so that the libertine is destitute of any testimony to found his faith on, and is forced to build on the mere cruelty of tyrants and persecutors.

Dech. The Christians had the world long enough to themselves to destroy all records and memorials, that made against them.

Shep. And so the faith of a Deist rests upon this, that there might have been such records, and that those records might have been sufficient to expose the falsity of the Christian history. Prodigious faith! not resembling a grain of mustard-seed, but like a mountain: indeed I have not seen such, no not among Papists. But, sir, had there been such testimony as you speak of, against the resurrection, and other miracles of our Saviour, his religion did not then want enemies as bitter and as watchful to destroy it, as the modern Deists, who certainly had not failed to stifle it in its very birth, could they have brought so good evidence against it.

Dech. The Christian religion, for many years, ran so low among the people, was confined to so obscure a corner of the world, and made, in every respect so inconsiderable a figure, as not to come even into the notice of persons sufficiently awake to an inquiry about the proofs either for or against it. All this time its own ignorant preachers were heaping up vouchers to support it; and those who might have produced a better set to refute it, having either never so much as heard of it, or thought it not worth their while to trouble themselves about it, took no care to record the marks of imposture, which, considering the extravagance of its pretensions, could hardly escape the notice of sensible observers, had there been such, who thought it worth their attending to. It grew, like a weed, in some neglected ground, to a large size, before it was seen by any, who had eyes to see into things of such a nature.

Shep. Surely you must be mistaken. At the time when

Christianity was introduced into the world, the Jews were a very sensible and knowing people, and lived intermixed with Greeks and Romans, whose understandings had all the opportunities of being well cultivated and enlightened, that could be expected in the most intelligent age of the world. The Jews were then in great expectation of a Messiah, and the Romans were alarmed at certain prophecies, importing, that the east was about to give a king to the whole world. When Christ appeared, his miracles made too great a noise, not to draw the attention of mankind, and the religion he preached with all imaginable boldness and freedom, so directly opposed the notions, so severely reproved the vices, both of Jews and Gentiles, and drew after it so many followers, as could not fail to excite, not only the curiosity, but the resentment of the world. Although the first preachers of Christianity were men of mean condition, yet so great was their success in making converts, some of whom were by no means in the lower class of mankind, that it was impossible for their adversaries, the Roman and Jewish rulers, to be indifferent to the progress they were making. Our Saviour and his apostles were arraigned, crucified, stoned, &c. insomuch that the cause of Christianity was pleaded before high-priests, governors and kings. Nothing in the world was farther from being done in a corner. It was openly preached to the greatest cities in the world, and even in Rome itself as early as the reign of Claudius; and that the greatest men in the world, did not look upon it as an obscure and inconsiderable business in that of Nero, is but too plain from the inhuman persecution it underwent at that time. Now, sir, had our religion betrayed itself by any primitive signs of imposture, it is plain they could not have passed unnoticed, nor unrecorded, considering the adversaries it had to deal with, whose power, policy, and malice, had they been helped out by the detection of only a few impostures, must infallibly have suppressed it in its very infancy. I hope, sir, it will seem unnecessary to vindicate the Deists from the charge of infidelity by any farther arguments, since it hath already been sufficiently proved, that they are believers of a very high class.

Dech. You will find it a hard matter, I believe, to draw any advantage to Christianity from so singular a position,

were it never so fully proved on the one side, and granted on the other; for if faith is so very firm a foundation to build on, in matters of this nature, as you represent it, we deistical believers may, after all, perhaps with more safety trust our cause to it, than you can yours.

Shep. It was not in order to bring any argument from thence in favour of revelation, that I endeavoured to prove, the Deists to be believers; but that, after all their dealing in demonstrations, and pretending to certainties, they might have the mortification to see themselves standing at least on no higher nor firmer ground than their adversaries, that is, on faith, a principle so long despised, and so severely ridiculed by them all.

Dech. Oh! but since you have so cleverly raised this ground under us, as well as yourselves, to a level with demonstration, we shall not for the future have so much reason to be ashamed of it.

Shep. I have not raised it all so high. There is a part of it left for you to stand on, that is low and slippery enough. Your faith, when closely examined, will be found to have all the properties of a weak credulity, which you so contemptuously, and so unjustly, ascribe to ours. You build it either on the supposed impossibility of facts, as easy to be performed, as it is for you to walk and speak; or else on the opposition given to our religion by the most partial adversaries, by the very worst and cruellest of mankind, who have left you no testimony against its miracles, but their inhuman persecutions, nor the least argument against the purity of its doctrines, but such as arose from the stupid absurdity of their own principles, and the wild licentiousness of their own vices. The opposition of such men is so far from giving you any foundation to build on, that no one thing in the world can speak so strongly, in behalf of Christianity; for so great is the tenderness of human nature in the worst of men, that they never choose to refute by the sword, when they can do it by argument, and beside, this demonstrates, that while the grounds of your faith were maintained by human power, those of ours were supported by the Divine.

Dech. And so yours is a divine faith?

Shep. Yes, sir, this alone is sufficient to entitle it to that

epithet; for nothing but the power of God could have upheld a religion against the association of all the policy, and power, and corruptions, of the world.

Dech. But for all this opposition, given to your religion by the Jews and Romans, you have no other evidence, but the testimony of men; and therefore your faith is purely human.

Shep. Our faith is the same with that of the first Christians, and therefore originally divine. Although, however, it should be allowed, that we in these remoter ages have nothing else to found our faith on, but the testimony of men; yet this is rendered so full and clear, in respect to the prodigious progress of Christianity in spite of persecution, by what is left on record in the writings of enemies, as well as friends, that nothing of this nature can be more firm and certain, than the grounds of our faith. But once we are persuaded, be it by what argument it will, that the New Testament is the word of God, our belief that God will make good to us the promises contained therein, is an act of trust in, and dependence on God; and therefore merits the appellation of divine faith. However, sir, I am very far from granting you, that our faith concerning the truth of the Scriptures rests entirely on the testimony of men. Those writings are, on all hands, allowed, and known to be very ancient, more ancient by far than many events foretold in them. Now the completion of such prophecies, as relate to these events, is a late, a present attestation, given by Providence, to the truth and genuineness of these writings; and therefore, on this score, our faith, relying on the testimony of God, is a divine faith.

Dech. But you Christians, before the publication of a late treatise,[a] had a surer way of proving your faith to be divine, namely, from the attestation given to it by the inward workings of the Holy Ghost upon your own minds. This, however, you do not insist on now, not only because that treatise hath bantered you out of a pretence so bold and groundless, but because such continual inspirations, being known only to yourselves, cannot be urged as proofs to us.

[a] Christianity not founded on Argument.

Shep. You wholly mistake the matter. We to this day actually insist on the reality of the thing.

Cunn. Enthusiasts do; but men of sense have long since disclaimed these extraordinary convictions and experiences.

Shep. Men of sense then have disclaimed the Scriptures; for in them we are told, 'that by grace we are saved through faith; and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.' The external testimony given to our religion, is sufficient to excite an historical faith in the worst of men, and even in devils; but this faith is only a foundation for fears, not for a new life and conversation, nor for the comfortable hope of a happy immortality. A lively, operative, and effectual faith, is never found, but where the Spirit of God hath raised it by his immediate grace and assistance. After faith hath taken possession of the understanding, something farther is necessary to urge it home upon the heart, in order to give it a sufficient ascendency over the will and affections. Now this is the work of God only, 'without whom we can do nothing.'

Dech. Do you not look upon the effectual faith you speak of, as the only spring of a good life, and the only instrument of your salvation?

Shep. I do.

Dech. How then can your good actions be deemed virtuous, or held rewardable, since, in respect to the faith that produces them, you are but mere machines, moved and acted on by the divine power?

Shep. We lay no stress on the merit of our good actions, nor are we so presumptuous as to claim a reward from God; we only hope for his mercy. However, as we do not hold the grace of God to be irresistible, if we have any thing to recommend us in his sight, it is our yielding up the reluctant motions of a corrupt and degenerate heart to the dictates of his Holy Spirit. As often as we do this, and, in consequence of it, betake ourselves to a life of piety and virtue, we demonstrate to all, who know us, the presence and power of God within us; for a good life is a miracle, exceeding the strength of man, and to be hoped for only from the hand of God. Thus, sir, every good Christian can as fully prove to others, as satisfy himself, that the Divine Being is both 'the author and finisher of his faith.'

Dech. After all, he is a strange sort of a man, whose goodness is not his own.

Shep. He is a much better man, who will suffer himself to be made good by another, than him, who having no goodness of his own growth, will suffer none to be grafted or planted in him.

Dech. Whether we suppose the happiness of another life to be the mere effect of faith, or to follow the good actions produced by faith, the supposition will be equally absurd. All actions are to be estimated by the principles and motives, from whence they proceed. The good actions of a Christian proceeding from his faith only, and his faith neither proceeding from his choice, nor depending on his power, I cannot see how either the cause or effect can recommend him to God, who approves only of those who are good by choice, and, we may presume, will never condemn those who are wicked only through a want of that faith, which he hath not given them.

Shep. He will never condemn any man for want of that goodness which he hath not afforded him the means of. But when the evidence of an historical faith in Christianity is bestowed on any man, if he resists that evidence, it is not to be expected, that God should inspire him with the more practical kind of faith, which can never be found, where the historical hath not first taken place.

Dech. If the historical evidence is sufficient, it cannot be resisted ; if it is not, we are in the right to reject it.

Shep. But whether it is or not, can never be known to any man, till he hath fairly and fully weighed that evidence. Most men have their faith in their own power, and find a way to believe as they please, because they can turn their minds from the evidence on the one side, and attend to that on the other ; they can read such books, and converse with such persons, as lean the same way with themselves ; and, if they should at any time do otherwise, the evidence for a disagreeable persuasion, being received with some aversion, hath little or no effect. There is nothing more common than to find men deaf to all the arguments that thwart their interests or pleasures, and yielding an easy assent to such as fall in with either. Now, as thinking under such a bias is certainly vicious, so thinking with an honest regard to truth

only is as undoubtedly virtuous. But if an article of faith is proposed, the nature and tendency of which are calculated to promote virtue, to allow the evidence of that article of faith its full weight, is virtuous in a higher sense: and to refuse a due attention to it, or to resist it, in case it is sufficient, is, we must own, criminal in a very high degree. If the faith of a real Christian leads him to virtue, and if that faith is in some measure the effect of his own choice, his faith is itself a virtue. If, on the other hand, the faith of a libertine is at all chosen by himself, and tends in the least to make him wicked, then his faith is not only or simply an error of his judgment, but also the reigning vice of his heart. Considered as an error, it is so gross, so superstitious an excess of faith, that I cannot help advising those who are addicted to it, as the best means to preserve the reputation of good sense, which they claim, to a little more incredulity. Nothing lays a man so open to all manner of imposition, as a strong faith erected on a weak foundation. Considered as a vice, I forbear to expatiate on it, being unwilling to give offence, and not knowing how far what I should say might concern the persons, who have done me the honour of this visit.

Dech. Do you really imagine we Deists have no principles to make us virtuous, because we reject the fictitious or compulsory principles of revelation?

Shep. Your creed may contain other articles of faith, better founded than this we have been considering. As, no doubt, you think it does, will you be so good, as to give us it at large? This act of condescension might afford us an occasion to enter more fully into the points already considered, and also to handle some others of no less importance. The Deists, and indeed the libertines of all degrees and denominations, are accused as men of dark and deep designs, who artfully attack the principles of other men, and still more artfully conceal their own, seldom declaring themselves by their writings in favour of any particular system of opinions, and, when they do, seeming frequently to contradict one another. I have read over, with all the attention I was master of, the celebrated performances of Lord Shaftsbury, Mr. Collins, Mr. Toland, Dr. Tindal, and some others of less note; and to my great concern, although I can

perceive what it is they would overturn, yet I cannot easily and clearly discern what they intend to establish, any farther, than that they labour to recommend the religion and law of nature, instead of revelation; and that their readers may gather, in some few instances, what they maintain by what they deny. This obscurity, proceed it from whence it will, is turned against them by their adversaries, and ascribed by some to the crudity or evil tendency of their tenets, by others, to artifice and chicane. Now I think it concerns them much to remove this unhandsome reflection by an open declaration of their opinions, both for truth sake, and their own. You will please to pardon me, sir, if I be too presuming in this request.

Dech. As the Deists are far from being dogmatists, so no one of them attempts to impose his own notions on the rest, or thinks himself obliged to follow those of the greatest man among them. They leave to others to think together in churches and nations, and take the liberty each man to think freely for himself. Yet this doth not hinder them from harmonizing in main matters; and those I will sum up to you in a few words, their tenets being few and plain. And as to the artifice, with which they have been maliciously charged by their adversaries, you will see sufficient reasons assigned for it in several passages of the 'Characteristics,' and in 'Christianity as Old as the Creation.' Riveted prejudices cannot be beaten down by regular attacks; nor can the opposite opinions be introduced, without some disguise. Besides, nobody, you know, would care to risk his own safety with a set of persecuting antagonists, who are ready, on all occasions, to argue with us from acts of parliament, and to call us to an uncouth sort of disputations before courts of judicature, where bigotry often presides on the bench, and always reigns in both the boxes.

Shep. You are very obliging, sir; and in my opinion do more honour to Deism, by frankly telling us what it is, than he who thinks it wants art, either to conceal or insinuate it.

Dech. Sir, it was not because the Deists were ashamed of their principles, that they chose to introduce them with so much address, and under the colour of more received notions.

A little art was necessary to render old prejudices disagreeable, and take away the strangeness of new truths. But now that people do, generally speaking, lean rather to our side, we make less scruple of declaring what we hold, and begin to open our system by degrees.

THE DEISTICAL CREED.

1. The Deists maintain, that the light of nature is sufficient to discover to every man, without instruction, all that is necessary or expedient for him, as a moral agent, to know.[a]

2. By this light every man perceives there is a God,[b] that is, a Being of infinite goodness, wisdom, justice, mercy, power, who is eternal, immutable, and perfect; who, being infinitely happy in himself, made nothing for his own sake, and consequently seeks no honour nor service from his creatures, it being impossible for their actions, be they good or bad, to affect him in any sense;[c] and who, as governor of the world, takes care to make his will sufficiently known to all his subjects.[d]

3. It appears by the light of nature, that the law, or the religion, by which God governs the world, and which is written in the heart of every man, is enforced, not by future and uncertain sanctions, but by the present pleasure ever attending on a good action, and the present remorse inseparably annexed to an evil one;[e] that to do good merely through hope of reward, and to abstain from evil, merely through dread of punishment, hath neither virtue nor goodness in it;[f] that to act up to the dictates of that nature, which God hath given us, is the way to please God; and to do otherwise, is to affront, dishonour, and displease him;[g] that the natural light, which shines in the breasts of all men, and enables them to discover the fitness of things, in which consists the law of nature, is divine; and that this law is eternal, and indispensable, and binds the actions of God himself.[h]

[a] Christianity as Old as the Creation, chap. 1. 3. Shafts. Inquiry concerning Virtue.
[b] Christianity as Old as the Creation, chap. 1, 2.
[c] Chap. 4, 5. [d] Chap. 1, 2. [e] Chap. 3.
[f] Chap. 14. [g] Chap. 3. 13, 14. [h] Chap. 13.

4. The Deists maintain, that although the dictates of natural religion are universal, and plain to all men, yet, since men have been led away from them by craft and superstition, it is necessary to reduce them to the light of nature again by discourses oral and written.[i] But, however,

5. As the more knowing kind of men may do this for the more ignorant, there is no necessity, nor even the least occasion, for calling in miracles and divine revelations for this purpose; and therefore they deny the reality of any revelation.[k]

Here is an amiable and glorious system of principles. In this all superstition, and priestcraft, and tyranny over the minds and opinions of mankind, are laid aside. In this the Deity is truly represented, not as in your scheme of religion, full of wrath, indignation, jealousy, imposing arbitrary and useless commands on free and rational beings, and placing his honour and glory in severely exacting obedience to such impositions; but full of lenity and indulgence to the infirmities of his creatures. In the next place, here is a law, not depending upon authority and traditions, not darkened by hyberbolical and figurative expressions, not mutilated by interpolations, corruptions, and imperfect or wrong translations, not capable of being explained away by arbitrary, or split into opposite and contradictory doctrines, by various and fanciful interpretations, but written on the heart of every man in capital letters. Place a man in what circumstances you please, and those circumstances shall suggest his duty to him. The whole creation is his teacher, and the relations and fitnesses of things are his standing monitors. He thinks for himself, and becomes his own casuist, divine, and priest, without either expense or trouble. The virtue of individuals, and the peace and happiness of societies, are not built by this system on a mere belief of future rewards and punishments, but on rewards enjoyed, and punishments inflicted, by the conscience of every man, immediately upon his doing a good or evil action. This dispensation, far from being partial, like some other pretended ones, is communicated universally to all ages and nations; 'its sound is gone out into all lands, and its words

[i] Chap. 8.

[k] Chap. 7. For this see the whole book, and all other deistical writings.

unto the ends of the world.' It is to reduce mankind to this universal and natural law, it is to turn away their eyes from false and foreign lights, and fix them on this internal illumination, that the great philosophers of this age do labour in their writings and conversations with a force of reason, and a sublimity of soul, which the whole Helvetic body of those who militate in the cause of revelations are strangers to.

Shep. You have almost persuaded me to be in love with Deism.

Dech. Almost! Why, Shepherd, I know you are a man of sense, and therefore can hardly take you for any other than a real Deist in your heart, although your craft, and the subsistence you earn by it, compel you to profess the contrary.

Shep. Your compliment to my understanding, sir, costs me too much, in point of sincerity, to be received. I am not yet a Deist, nor can the most rapid torrent of eloquence or wit carry me down with it to Deism, unless its principles are supported by close and convincing arguments. If you can bring such in its favour, you will then have the honour of converting to it an honest and candid inquirer after truth.

Dech. Would you really profess yourself a Deist, if you were thoroughly convinced of the truth and solidity of our principles?

Shep. You know, sir, as well as any body, how little I have to hinder me from making such a profession, did it appear to go against my conscience, no more than it does against my wordly interest. You yourself would take care your convert should not die a martyr to your principles, merely for want of necessaries.

Dech. Your present income of 34*l.* a year, as you intimate, ought not to tie you to disingenuous professions; and it would be very hard, if I could not provide for an honest fellow, of my own making, at a better rate than that. If all other expedients failed, I could procure or purchase you a much better living than this, surely, which you might leave to the care of some sorry curate, and spend the remainder of your days in the enjoyment of the town, and my table, and in writing, as some very ingenious divines

whom I could name, have done, in defence of such doctrines as seem to put Christianity on a new and clearer footing; but tend, in the conclusion, entirely to overturn it.

Shep. Whether you are in jest or earnest, this, I am afraid, would seem somewhat base and disingenuous; though now I think on it, if I could once heartily close with the principles you recommend, I should probably make but little scruple or difficulty of using some art in the support of opinions so soothing and beneficial to me.

Dech. Ah parson! you are very sly. However, I am ready to defend the deistical creed against all your objections, and shall leave your future conduct to your own discretion. But as this defence will take up a good deal of time, are you willing we should pass a few mornings together for so good a purpose?

Temp. O, by all means. Mr. Shepherd does not seem to be so diffident of his cause as to decline it. If I was well enough acquainted with the gentleman to ask a favour, I would beg his compliance with this overture, as a singular kindness to me.

Shep. Sir, I do most readily agree to it, both for your satisfaction, and my own information.

DIALOGUE II.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Shep. GENTLEMEN, I am very glad to see you here so early. It is however matter of surprise to me, that you should be abroad at this hour, when some others of your rank are but going to bed.

Dech. I have been always an early riser in the country; in town I am a conformist.

Temp. For my part, I am never so cheerful as the day I rise betimes. Lying long in bed relaxes the spring both of body and mind. As early hours in the morning are impossible without early hours over night, and as most of our excesses are committed by candle-light, I do not know any thing that would contribute more to virtue, than a rule, or

some call of business, that could rouse one every day at five or six in the morning. I had formerly a settled prejudice against positive duties; but the great service, that might be drawn from such a duty for this purpose, reconciles me a little to institutions of that nature; so that I begin to doubt whether we do not really stand in need of them, and to wish we were obliged, by sufficient authority, to rise always at five in the morning. It would deliver us from a custom infinitely prejudicial to health and virtue, and give us a longer and a happier life. I honour him much who said, 'he that lengthens his nights shortens his days.'

Dech. When you make a revelation, Templeton, you may take care to put in this new positive institution; and that you will not in time become a prophet, or a revealer, I am by no means certain. You was seized with some slight symptoms of enthusiasm in this very place on Tuesday last; and they seem to grow upon you so fast, that I am really not altogether free from apprehensions of a new Templetonian testament or dispensation. Virtue consists not in rising either late or early, nor in any artificial methods of managing ourselves, but in following nature, whose light is sufficient, according to the first article of our creed, to discover to every man, without instruction or institution, all that is necessary for him, as a moral agent, either to know or practise.

Shep. Will you be so good, sir, as to tell me in what the light of nature consists?

Dech. It consists in two things, sentiment and reason. By sentiment I mean, first, that impression made on the heart of every man, by which he is naturally led to seek his own good, and to preserve himself; secondly, that love of the sexes, by which they are prompted to propagate and preserve the species; thirdly, that storge by which the parents are moved to cherish and preserve their offspring; fourthly, that benevolenee, by which one human creature is inclined to benefit and preserve another; and lastly, that perception of beauty in a good, and of deformity in a bad, action, which every man feels in himself. By reason I mean that divine faculty of the mind, by which all men are enabled to judge and direct themselves in the choice of such means, as are necessary to bring about the ends suggested

to them by their natural sentiments, to decide between them according to the fitnesses of things, when they interfere, and to restrain them within due bounds, when at any time they tend to excess or irregularity. This, sir, is what I mean by the light or law of nature, implanted in the breasts of all men, and adequate to all their moral purposes. As every one must acknowledge there is such a law within him, independent of all instruction, there can be no need of a revelation. It was in full confidence of forcing you to own this, that I suffered you to carry your arguments relating to the history of miracles and resurrections, to their full length, knowing well, that as soon as the natural and universal revelation came to be considered and demonstrated, all your talk about the proofs of a particular dispensation, and the necessity of it, would come to the ground. Pray, sir, do you own the clearness of this law, as I have described it, within yourself?

Shep. I do not.

Dech. You do not! Then you deny, I suppose, you have any desire to preserve yourself, to propagate your species, to cherish your offspring, to do good to mankind, to cultivate virtue, and extirpate vice from your mind; you deny the existence of a rational faculty within you; you deny, in a word, that you are a man.

Shep. I deny none of these things; but I doubt indeed whether any, or all of these, can be properly called a law.

Dech. Do they not oblige and bind the actions of men? And is not that which binds the actions of moral agents, a law?

Shep. Does the law of nature consist in sentiment, or in reason?

Dech. In both.

Shep. So far as it consists in sentiment, the brutes, having those instincts, which you call sentiments, are moral agents, as well as men.

Dech. By no means. Brutes are not struck with a moral sense of good and evil, as men are. Brutes are destitute of reason and choice, and therefore their instincts are not laws; but man being directed by his reason to act in conformity to his sentiments, and being free to obey its dictates, those sentiments become a law to him.

Shep. No sense, perception, or instinct, can be called moral, till some higher faculty enjoins obedience to it as a duty. It is reason therefore in which the law of nature consists; for men are only accountable for their actions, so far as they are rational creatures; and that man, who is wholly deprived of reason, is, for the time, neither a moral, nor an accountable agent. But pray, sir, have all men one and the same law of nature? or hath every man a distinct natural law of his own?

Dech. All men have the same natural law. The sentiments I mentioned, and the faculty of reason, are the same in every man.

Shep. As men are to deal with one another, and live in community, they ought certainly to have but one universal law; for if this man were to act by one law, and that by another, it is easy to see, that great mischiefs and clashings would arise from thence. You know better than I do, that no trial can be had, nor a judge determine in any cause, but upon a common law, which parties on both sides must submit to. If men had different laws, that which is right by one man's law, might be wrong by another's, and consequently right or wrong could never be distinguished. Now, sir, it is a common observation, that the sentiments and reasonings of mankind are very different. Although all men have those sentiments you speak of, and reason too, yet this sentiment is stronger in one man, and that in another; and reason, which is clear and strong in some men, is weak and ill-informed in others. Hence it comes to pass, that Mr. Templeton may do a thing, which you think right, and I wrong, though both you and I are perfectly unprejudiced in the matter. In this respect, therefore, the mere sentiments and reasons of men cannot be a perfect law. Were it not for this great diversity, the breast of every man might be appealed to, as containing the common law, and no judge could ever mistake in his decrees. But as the contrary is evident to experience, mankind are forced to form themselves into societies, and determine what shall be the common law of all the members.

Dech. Yet if reason were not able to direct, the society could frame no common law, capable of answering the end.

Shep. Although it should mix unjust with equitable

laws, which all societies have done, partly by mistake, and partly with design; yet those who are to be judged by those laws, are in a better condition, than if every man were left to be his own lawgiver.

Dech. When you say, this or that law of society is unjust, is it not reason that tells you so?

Shep. I cannot tell whether it be or not. My reason says one thing, that of the society says another; and two societies are as apt to differ, as two men. But if reason were never so uniform in all men, yet I cannot see what authority it hath to set up for a legislator. If any man should deny its authority, and act against reason; and, as it often happens, be powerful enough to defend himself against all the consequences of such a procedure; what could reason do to enforce or vindicate its laws? A law is a rule of action imposed on a free and moral agent, by a known superior, whose authority cannot be questioned, with a reward or penalty, or both annexed; and if the law is perfect, it must be just, and its sanctions must be adequate to the just and good end proposed by it. Be pleased to shew, sir, that the dictates of mere reason are supported by such authority, and by rewards and punishments of weight and cogency equal to the security and happiness of all mankind.

Dech. To act against nature is shocking to a rational being, and therefore the authority of nature is sufficient. As to the rewards and punishments annexed to the law of nature, they too seem to be sufficient. No man can be more surely rewarded for a good action, than he who hath his reward in his own hand, and can bestow it as plentifully on himself as he pleases, in that greatest of all pleasures, the pleasure of doing good. Nor can any man be more terribly punished, than by being left, after doing an evil action, to the severe stings of his own guilty conscience.

Shep. Every man therefore is subject to the law of his own heart, and that law is founded on the mere authority of his own nature. He is likewise his own judge, rewarder, and punisher. By this, which we may call the self-sufficient scheme, a man must either be subject to no law of nature, that is, in any proper sense of the word law; or else he must be superior to himself; for every law is the will of some superior imposed upon one, who is inferior and subject.

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL of the PACIFIC

Dech. Are not the nature and reason of a man superior to his will and passions, and every thing else about him, that can be said to act? there is certainly in every man a superior part that inposes, and an inferior that obeys, the law.

Shep. I find the self-sufficient scheme is more perfect than I imagined. Every man, it seems, hath a legislator, and subjects, with a court of justice, and executioners, in his own breast.

Dech. Yes; every one of us is a moral, as well as a physical microcosm. Did you never hear of the 'forum conscientiæ?'

Shep. I have; but imagined, till now, it had only been a metaphorical forum, or court of justice. It hath been received as a maxim by some, that the will obeys and executes the last result of the understanding or reason. Whenever therefore a man does wrong, the legislator hath been deficient, and the law unjust; whereas you and Tindal maintain, that the law of nature is perfect, and universally right and clear.

Dech. But, good sir, that maxim is no maxim with me. I say a man may act against nature and reason. If he might not, he could never be guilty of a culpable action; for all that is required of any man is, to act up to the dictates of his reason, and that nature which God hath given him.

Shep. When the reward annexed to the natural law is conferred on any man for doing well, or the punishment inflicted on him for doing ill, is the man, properly speaking, said to be rewarded or punished?

Dech. No doubt he is.

Shep. It is not then his will or passions, or the active part of him alone, that is said to be rewarded or punished, but the whole man; and when he acts against the laws of nature, poor nature herself, who hath rightly dictated the law to him, is punished together with the more peccant part. I really pity that unhappy legislatrix, who, without any fault of hers, must, as often as her subjects disobey her, come down from her tribunal, and suffer with them under the hand of her own executioner. The constitution of this internal court of conscience is ill regulated, in my opinion. I find there are great disorders in the moral microcosm, as

well as in the natural, and, what is worse, great injustice. However, I must own, it is a great alleviation of this grievance, that the punishments which nature undergoes on such occasions, being inflicted only by her own directions, are very gentle. Besides, if she be so corrupt and ill-disposed, as some say she is, it is little matter what she suffers. It seems very strange, Mr. Dechaine, that you, who I suppose cannot conceive the possibility of a personal distinction in the Divine Nature, should nevertheless have found out a sufficient number of personalities in one individual man, to furnish a court of conscience. If the mind of a man is so populous, the poorest beggar may say, we, as well as the king.

Dech. You have a strange knack at allegory.

Shep. Nay, it was of your own starting; and, besides, you did not make an allegory of it altogether, but somewhat worse. In order to give authority to your law of nature, you found out a ruler and subjects in the same man. But one faculty in a man can never be lawgiver to another; nor can the duty and obligation lying upon any man, arise out of, and terminate in himself. He must be subject to some higher power, if he is to be governed at all.

Dech. If there is any defect in the authority of the natural law, it is abundantly supplied by the authority of society. If each man contains not a perfect moral world within himself, society, into which he is by natural inclination, and I had almost said by necessity, obliged to enter, is a perfect body, and sufficiently authorizes the laws of nature and reason.

Shep. This is giving up the whole matter in question, and flying from a natural to an artificial and factitious authority. If the law of nature is a perfect law, it must have a natural authority, and not a borrowed one.

Dech. Society is necessary and natural, and therefore the authority it derives on the law of nature is purely natural.

Shep. I thought Tindal, and the rest of you, had maintained, that every man hath a perfect law of nature in his own breast, whether in society, or out of it, go whither he will. I have also hitherto imagined, that all the abettors of the self-sufficient scheme had founded society on the law of nature, instead of sending the law of nature to borrow its basis from civil society. For my part, I think it evident to

demonstration, that society cannot at all subsist, if its several members be not subject to some authority and law, previous to those of society. And as to the inward uprightness and virtue of individuals, society, which hath to do with nothing more than our outward actions, can never provide for them. The magistrate bears no rule over the consciences of men, into which he cannot dive; and therefore, unless virtue, contrary to all your maxims, consists in mere exterior conduct, allured or forced by civil rewards and punishments, the political Leviathan can afford no assistance towards the sincere and real goodness of his members, and is of consequence but an huge body, without soul or strength. You say, I think, mankind cannot subsist out of society.

Dech. If we comprehend families in the number of societies, I believe they cannot.

Shep. Nay, for that matter, families cannot subsist without the protection of greater societies; for as children depend absolutely on families for subsistence, so do families on kingdoms and commonwealths for peace, security, property, life, and every thing. Pray, can society subsist without laws?

Dech. No, its members must know by what constitutions or customs they are to regulate their actions, and what is lawful or penal; or they can never answer either the public ends of society, or their own private purposes of entering into it.

Shep. Magistrates too, seem to be as necessary as laws; for although the laws were ever so good and just, they could not execute themselves.

Dech. I grant it.

Shep. As to the lower magistrates, we need not inquire about their qualifications, because we may presume they will take care to accommodate their dispositions and conduct to the mind of the Supreme. But how, think you, ought he to be qualified, who is to be set at the head of society?

Dech. The better to answer the ends of society, he ought to be wise and just.

Shep. So I think; because the ill effects of folly or partiality in him will be severely and extensively felt among his subjects. If the inferior magistrates find him to be weak or

foolish, they will impose on his blindness; and if they think him unjust, they will take the liberty to be so too, and hope for his connivance; and on both accounts will be apt to abuse such portions of his power, as may happen to be lodged in their hands. The people too will always either despise such a magistracy, and run into rebellions and insurrections, or they will, by interest made with the magistrates, by bribes and evasions of the laws, by parties and factions, endeavour to restrain the common advantages of the society, each man, or party of men, to themselves. By these means good men will be oppressed, and bad men advanced and enriched, contrary to the well-being and ends of society.

Dech. This is all very true; but I think it is little to our present purpose.

Shep. You will be of another opinion very soon. The better intelligence the supreme magistrate hath of what is doing among his subjects, and the more perfectly he understands the rules of government, you will grant, I believe, that he will be the better qualified to superintend the public affairs.

Dech. I will.

Shep. For my part, I think it evidently necessary, he should be perfectly well acquainted with the principles and conduct of all his under officers, and of his subjects; for if he is not, he can never, in any sort, keep either the one or the other in their duty. The greatest irregularities and enormities may be committed by both, without being either animadverted upon, or brought within a possibility of being punished. Crimes not cognizable are not punishable. Again, if he be not most strictly and steadily just, it will be little matter how knowing or wise you suppose him to be, because he may oppress the innocent, and promote the wicked, or suffer others to do it, notwithstanding the highest and most perfect knowledge you can imagine him vested with. As to his power, it must be proportionable to his wisdom and justice, or those qualifications will be useless. He must be able sufficiently to reward every good action, and punish every ill one, or he will never be fit to fill the place of a supreme magistrate; because, otherwise, virtue might go unrewarded, and vice unpunished, though he were

ever so well apprised of both, and ever so desirous of chastising the one, and encouraging the other. Now it is not only necessary to the very being and possibility of society, that he should be wise, just, and powerful, in this high degree; but it is also necessary, that his under-officers and subjects should firmly believe him to be so, because their behaviour will not be regulated by his unknown qualifications, but by their opinion or knowledge of them. A bad man in power, who thinks he may escape unpunished for his mal-administration, through the ignorance, injustice, or weakness of his supreme, will turn that portion of power he is possessed of, directly against the good of society; nay, he will become in his own opinion, effectually supreme, inasmuch as he will not expect to be called to account for his conduct. That man, who does not believe he is to account in the severest manner for the use and application of his power, ought never to be trusted with any power, because he will endeavour to draw all the advantages of the society to himself, and his instruments, and turn all its weight and strength against those who thwart his usurpations. How can mankind be more unhappy, than under a fallible, or I should rather say, a corrupt and wicked administration, that stands in awe of no superior, that is under a lawless power? As to the subjects, if they do not look upon themselves as accountable to such wisdom as there is no hiding from, such justice as there is no biasing, and such power as there is no resisting or escaping, they will never pay any more than an outward respect to the civil power, and that only when it is too strong for them. Whenever the magistracy can be resisted, or the truth, on which right and justice depend, concealed, or the laws evaded, which you know may be done in most cases, they will follow their own private ends, without any regard to those of the public. There is, in short, no enormity, which under the influence of a persuasion, that the administration is at all defective in wisdom, justice, or power, they will not be ready to commit. Thus, sir, I think it appears, that a community consisting of magistrates and subjects, who do not think their supreme governor qualified as aforesaid, is but a rope of sand, and instead of meriting the name of society, should rather be called a confederacy against all the rights of men, all the

comforts of life, and all the ends of civil government. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, is there any justice, peace, or safety to be expected in civil society, without such trials in capital, and other cases, as are brought on in our courts of law and justice ?

Dech. No,

Shep. Is it not by those trials, that the benefits and punishments of society are applied ?

Dech. It is.

Shep. Can there be any such thing as a trial without evidence ?

Dech. It is impossible.

Shep. Can those, who on trials are to bring verdicts, or pronounce decrees, have personal knowledge of the merits in every point disputed before them ?

Dech. They can have it few, or none.

Shep. How then are they to come at information ?

Dech. By the testimony of indifferent persons, who know the case inquired into.

Shep. Can the judge or jury see into the hearts of witnesses, and satisfy themselves whether they are deposing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth ?

Dech. No, indeed.

Shep, If the witnesses then are not firmly persuaded, that he who holds the supreme power over them, can see into their hearts, is perfectly acquainted with the case they swear to, and is both just and able to punish them in the most terrible manner for prevarication, they may depose a falshood, and thereby frustrate the whole intention of the trial.

Dech. God, I find, is your Supreme Magistrate.

Shep. Yes, it is God alone who can be supreme in a civil, as well as a physicial sense. No mortal, no angel, is able to fill that high station. None but he, who is present at all transactions, to whom all hearts, though ever so dark and manifold, are transparent, whose justice there is no biassing, and from whose power there is no escaping, against whom the grave itself is no defence ; none but he can be an infallible and universal witness, a competent judge in all cases, and a supreme governor. Society depends absolutely on him, and all kingdoms and communities are but pro

vinces of his universal kingdom. He is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, and the Judge of judges. You sought in vain for a law within yourself, and when you could not find an authority there, you had recourse to society for it; but society could furnish you with no other, than what it borrows from the author of its being, and the source of all power, 'whose kingdom ruleth over all.' Now, sir, I have three things to observe to you concerning what hath been said. In the first place, if God were rightly and firmly believed in, by the under magistrates and subjects of any community, the wisdom, justice, and power of the Divine head would derive themselves in the channel of that faith upon all the members of the public body, and make the whole extremely happy; and I may safely venture to say, that all the defects of civil society, all the injustice, oppression, rapine, rebellion, faction, all intestine struggles for power, and all the civil wars, that shake or tear society to pieces, spring only from a want of faith in God, and inattention to his superintendence. Secondly, as God's kingdom reaches all places, and comprehends all things, so it extends likewise to all times; and as he neither manifests what he knows of the secret virtues or vices of mankind, as he neither inflicts an adequate punishment on the latter, nor confers a full reward on the former, in this life, so there must be a time hereafter, when he will assemble all the members of his wide-extended dominion to judgment, and do ample justice on them all. Thirdly, As mankind cannot subsist out of society, nor society itself subsist without religion, I mean without faith in the infinite wisdom, justice, and power of God, and a judgment to come, religion, cannot be a falsehood. Is it possible, that all the happiness of mankind, that the whole civil world, that peace, safety, justice, and the truth itself, should have nothing to stand on, but a lie? Is it to be supposed, that a God of infinite power could give the world no other foundation; or that a God of infinite truth and goodness could be obliged to help out his creation with deceit and fraud, and was able no otherwise to provide for the happiness of all his rational creatures, but by a gross and universal imposture? These things cannot be supposed, and therefore religion is, and must be, true.

Temp. I really think it a clear and irresistable demonstration; and as it is entirely new to me, I cannot withhold the pleasure I know it will afford Mr. Shepherd, to hear me say, I think myself happy in the acquaintance of man, who hath given me entire satisfaction on a point of the last importance to me.

Dech. Well; but as it is what I should in a great measure have granted, without any difficulty, the doctor needed not to have taken so great a compass in the proof of it. We Deists are far from denying religion, as you may see by our creed.

Shep. But you seem, sir, to forget that you were for terminating your natural law in yourself, and carrying its authority no higher, than nature or society. This made it necessary to shew the true source of all law, authority, and obligation.

Dech. The real matter in debate wants yet to be inquired into, namely, whether nature or reason cannot give us a right idea of God, and our dependence on him; for all you have said, Mr. Shepherd, is only a proof of religion in general, whereas we are not at all disputing, whether there is any true religion, or not, but whether there is any occasion for revelation. Religion, on which so much depends, ought to be universal and clear; whereas no revelation can have either of those properties. It may be materially altered or corrupted by the inventions, and interested views, it may be variously interpreted by the prejudices, and false reasonings, and it may be wholly lost by the negligence, of those, through whose hands it ought to pass the rest of the world. In matters of far less consequence, God hath afforded us means of knowledge, which are in no danger of being ill interpreted, or imperfectly transmitted, because they speak in a plain and intelligible language to every body. Is it to be supposed, that an infinitely wise God, who knows so well how to adapt the means to the end in all cases, should have given senses to all men, by which they can easily distinguish objects, not only those which are of some importance to them, but even such as they are little, or not at all, concerned in, and reason to judge even in matters of curiosity; is it, I say, to be supposed, that he should have left us to uncertain or defective means of knowing himself, since the

happiness of every individual, and consequently of all communities, depends absolutely on that knowledge? No man needs to be taught there is a God, who governs the world he hath made, with infinite goodness and power. He finds the idea of this great Being impressed by nature on his mind, and suggested to him by all her works. No deduction of reason, no idea of sense, can be more clearly formed, or strongly apprehended by the soul of man, than the being of God, independent of all revelation and instruction. Accordingly we find, that all men in all nations believe in God; which had never been the case, if the idea of that Divine Being were not universally natural. Thus, sir, it appears, that the religion or law of nature hath its authority from the light of nature, and is perfect, without the aid of revelation.

Shep. If it should happen to be proved, that nature alone does not clearly suggest a right idea of God to us, it will follow, that revelation must do it, or will be destitute of it. And howsoever defective the methods of propagating this revelation may be, we are not now inquiring about them, but only whether, from the mere light of nature, every man hath a right idea of God. For Lord Shaftsbury and you will own, that wrong ideas of God will hurt societies as much, if not more, than ignorance of him could do. Yet before we go any farther, I must observe to you, that although the idea of God were derived from a revelation only vouchsafed to our common parents, that idea could hardly ever be wholly lost or wanting to any of their posterity. The idea of an infinitely great and glorious Creator and Governor, once revealed, will strike deep into the mind, and cannot, without extreme difficulty, be effaced, The parent, who hath himself received this idea from revelation, cannot conceal it from his children, without a direct rebellion against his Maker, and the most senseless sort of cruelty to them. Upon the increase of mankind, if any parent should neglect to tell his son there is a God, which however cannot be supposed, that son could not possibly fail of hearing it from others. An article of knowledge, on which all duty, all obligation, all law and justice so necessarily depends, could not well be a secret to him. All mankind, and the whole course of his dealings in the world, would be his instructors in this; and

therefore, although we were to depend on revelation alone for our idea of God, yet no rational man, unless he were to grow up from his infancy, like a tree, on some mountain remote from his parents and all mankind, could possibly fail to have some idea or other of God. It is true, indeed, there is this objection to the supposition of our having the idea of God from revelation only, that some men may easily, and all men possibly, depart from the right idea, and, in process of time, entertain a wrong notion of the Deity; but this, of which there are but too many actual proofs, evidently demonstrates to us, that we have no natural innate idea of God; for if we had, and that idea were as plain and strong, as any idea of sense, in all men, no mortal could ever entertain an absurd or unworthy notion of him. All the false or absurd theology in the world, proves incontestably to us, that every man hath not a right idea of the Divine Nature from within himself; nay, I believe I may safely question, whether any man hath it from the mere light of nature. Nothing can seem more strange, than that the wisest and most sagacious of all men, I mean the philosophers, should have searched with all imaginable candour and anxiety for this idea, and searched in vain, if it had been impressed as clearly and strongly on their own minds, as the idea of a tree, or any other common object of sense. Do you really believe, Mr. Dechaine, that all knowledge, absolutely necessary to the subsistence of man, must spring from the light of nature?

Dech. Most undoubtedly.

Shep. If a man and woman were created in full maturity of mind and body, with all their faculties and senses in the highest natural perfection, would they be able to distinguish poisonous from nutritious fruits?

Dech. I believe scarcely.

Shep. Would they be able to distinguish between the effects of walking over a plain and a precipice, till they had made a trial?

Dech. Hardly.

Shep. Would they know what pain, sickness, and death are, having not yet seen an instance of the last, or felt the former?

Dech. They would not.

Shep. It seems then, that it is not necessary to our subsistence to know what will preserve or destroy life; for if it were, nature would teach the aforesaid pair the difference between life and death, and between such things as are fitted to preserve the first, and those that unavoidably bring on the last.

Dech. But nature, sir, sufficiently instructs us to act according to the natural fitnesses of things, once they are known by experience; to avoid danger, pain, and death, together with their causes; and to desire safety, to pursue pleasure, to preserve life, and to use the necessary means for these purposes, as soon as they are discovered.

Shep. This I grant, and natural reason teaches us to close with the true notions of God and religion, as soon as they are found out. You spoke just now of acting according to the natural fitnesses of things, once they are discovered by experience. Pray is it agreeable to your notions of God's goodness to imagine he would leave our first parents, on whose lives the being of all their posterity depended, to experiments that might prove fatal to them? For my part, I am forced to believe he taught them the difference between life and death, between wholsome and poisonous fruits, between walking over plains and precipices, with all other necessary points of knowledge, their natural senses only supplying them with the mere ideas of things. The office of the senses is to furnish us with ideas; that of reason, to compare those ideas, and form judgments out of them; and that of the instincts, sentiments, passions, appetites, &c. to give us desires towards that which is good and aversions to that which is hurtful to us. But none of these, nor all of them together, can strike out any useful point of knowledge, till either experience or instruction have shewn us the natures, the fitnesses, and the differences of things. Now experience is too late an instructor in all things immediately and absolutely necessary to be known. We do not leave our children to the hazardous or dreadful tutorage of experience in such matters; and we may presume God, who is the tenderest of all parents, would not leave his exposed to dangers, I should rather say, to certain ruin, for want of knowledge, which he placed them under the absolute necessity of deriving either from his instruc-

tions, or from trials of the most hazardous nature, some one or other of which could hardly fail to destroy them. Actions moral or immoral in the highest degree, to one who knows the tendency of those actions, and the law of God, are perfectly indifferent to a person unacquainted with that law; and, what is still more, before experience or some other instructor hath taught him the tendency of those actions, he knows neither the natural good or evil, fitness or unfitness, of them. If the man already described saw the woman a drowning, let him love her ever so tenderly, as he could neither be sensible of her danger, nor know how to relieve her, though stretching out his hand to her would be sufficient, it would be neither cruelty nor sin in him to let her sink. He might give her poison, or let a stone drop from a precipice on her head, if he were not told, that such an action would put her to excessive pain, or kill her, and if the evil of pain and death were not previously made known to him.

Dech. But supposing him well apprized, no matter by what means, of the natural evil proceeding from such actions, would he not then abhor them?

Shep. He would; yet his abhorrence arising only from instinct, natural affection, or what you call sentiment, as it does in beasts, would be purely animal, and by no means either moral or religious, if he were not first convinced, that he was to regulate his life by the dictates of sentiment and reason, and to look upon those dictates as the laws of God, by which he was to be judged. The propensities and aversions of his own mind could never become laws to him, till he was once apprized, that God made him, was his supreme Governor, had planted those propensities and aversions in him, and would be pleased or displeased with him, according as he acted conformably to, or inconsistently with them. If you should find a printed paper, drawn up in the form of a statute, and pretending to oblige you and all your countrymen to allow your wives a certain proportion of your fortunes yearly, to be disposed of by them as they should think proper, although you should, through your great regard for your wife, judge the allowance reasonable, yet you would never think yourself legally obliged to pay it to her, till you found the said statute had actually

passed both houses of parliament, and gained the royal assent. Besides, if a man should think himself under a moral obligation to obey all the propensities and aversions of his own nature, as many of them are irregular, excessive, or vicious, he would quickly find himself subject to a most iniquitous law; or, if he did not, others with whom he might happen to have dealings, would feel it to their cost.

Dech. But would not reason, which is the governing principle in man, set the irregularities of the passions straight, and distinguish between such inclinations or aversions as are good, and those that are evil?

Shep. I am afraid it would not, if every man were to reason and think for himself. All men do not reason alike. Some men reason weakly from right principles, others draw their premises from those very passions that ought to be corrected or suppressed; and, what is as bad, reason doth not dictate with sufficient authority, and consequently cannot enforce obedience. She may judge of the fitness of a law, once it is given, and persuade us to obey it; but she can give no laws herself, as we have already seen. The mind of man is in itself a beautiful and convenient palace, with all the necessary furniture and utensils in their proper places. At first its doors and windows are shut up, all is dark within, and reason, its owner and inhabitant, lies fast asleep. But as soon as it is thrown open to the outward light, reason begins to rouse by degrees, and look about it; yet knows not the uses of the apartments, or the furniture, till it is taught their convenience and fitness. The architect instructs it in the uses of such as are from the beginning absolutely necessary, and leaves it to exercise its sagacity in finding out the more remote fitnesses by degrees. He leads it to the windows, from whence he shews it the prospect on all sides, and gives it a just notion of its own situation, in respect to its neighbours, and the places from whence it is to bring its necessaries; he carries it up the stairs, and places it on the roof, from whence he shews it the things above, and describes the heavens to it. He demonstrates to it, that all the light it enjoys is derived from the illustrious orb that shines on high, and sheds its beams around, and through all the palace.

Dech. If we must talk in allegory, I am of opinion this

palace is well enlightened from within, and that its inhabitant hath an excellent lamp, by which he can direct himself through all the apartments, and view all the furniture; nor is he so stupid as not easily to discover their uses, without the help of a guide and instructor to explain his own dwelling to him.

Shep. Pray, sir, whence did you receive the idea you have of God? Was it from the mere light of nature, from the internal lamp, or from instruction?

Dech. It was from instruction; but my teachers might have saved themselves the pains, because I should have had it without their documents.

Shep. Did you ever know, or even hear of, any person who had an idea of God, without ever having been taught it?

Dech. No; for the good old people, our parents, are so officious in this respect, as to teach us their own notions of God as soon as it is possible for us to apprehend them.

Shep. They teach you then, I suppose, what you knew before; but I should think they would never have given themselves the trouble, had they perceived by your infant acts of devotion, or by your expressions when you came to the use of speech, that you had a right idea of God from the first moment of your appearance in the world.

Dech. I do not say, sir, that infants perceive in themselves an idea of God. They have no sort of occasion for that idea, till they grow up a little, and begin to be capable of duty and obligation; and then it would shew itself in them, although nobody had ever suggested it to them.

Shep. This you are not sure of, because you never knew nor heard an instance of it in your life. And to say it would be so, contrary to the sense of all mankind, who think it necessary to imprint this idea on the minds of children by instruction, without any other grounds for your opinion but mere conjecture, seems not a little bold and arbitrary. For my part, I think it evident, beyond all contradiction, that we have no innate ideas at all. We need not go to Locke to be informed of this, which the observation of every parent and nurse on earth can so fully confirm to us. For nature, to give us ideas which we must and do receive afterward by the usual inlets of our senses, would be contrary to that frugality of means and causes, which she observes in

all things else. But it seems still more absurd to suppose we have ideas, which we are not sensible of till a certain age; that they lie dormant in the mind for a good many years; that when they do make their appearance, it is to no sort of purpose, inasmuch as they do not help in the least to set us right in our notions of their objects, which happened to be amiss before they shewed themselves in the mind; nay, and that we are never sensible of their birth within us, nor even of any struggle between them and our irrational preconceptions.

Dech. This which you make such a wonder of, happens to all men in respect to all or most of their ideas, which, being stored in the memory, lie there frequently for whole years so dormant, that the mind never recollects them, nor finds itself conscious of their existence, till their own objects, or some other ideas, with which they were assembled, happen to recall them to the mind.

Shep. This is very true, and I own would fully answer my argument against innate ideas, drawn from their not shewing themselves in the mind for some time, were it not that whenever the mind recollects any idea, it is at the same time conscious of having had that idea formerly, whereas when it first perceives in itself the idea of God, impressed by instruction, it is not in the least conscious that any such idea was ever perceived in it before. But, not to insist on this, I am still surprised, that when the time for its appearance is come, and the mind, which before that time hath entertained the most unworthy idea of divinity, stands in great need of better information, this innate idea never rectifies its notions, nor reduces them to a right way of thinking about God.

Dech. That I think is easily enough accounted for. The mind having been long used to, and prejudiced in favour of, its erroneous conceptions of God, will not resign them for the right impression, when it does appear. You cannot but be sensible how difficult a thing it is to dislodge a religious prejudice from the mind, and introduce a truth in the place of it. This you will own is a work too hard for most of you teachers, who, if you may believe yourselves, lend nature and reason all the assistance you can, when gross errors are to be combated, and glaring truths recommended.

Shep. Yes; but when the Pagan, whom I endeavour to reclaim from the worship of the devil, or a plurality of gods, although he is not convinced, is sensible of the theology I have been laying before him, and also of the difference between that and his old opinions; whereas he was never conscious in the least of any idea of God arising spontaneously in his own mind, and opposing that which he received from a wrong education. Now an innate idea of God, which neither prevents unworthy notions of him, nor removes them when received, which is neither at all perceived itself, nor to be guessed at in the least by its effects, is a very strange sort of an idea, and of no manner of use, that I can see; though by what you said awhile ago about the absolute necessity of a natural, universal, and clear religion and law in the breast of every man, I should think your natural idea of God, on which all natural religion and law must absolutely depend, ought to be strong and evident in the highest degree, in order to answer any of the ends you propose by it. What shall we say to it therefore, when no mortal can perceive the least glimpse of it in himself, nor trace it in his mind by the faintest footsteps or effects? This natural idea of God, were it printed in so deep and strong a character on the mind of every man, would certainly have either prevented all manner of idolatry in the world, or would be able to banish it from thence, should it happen by any strange unnatural means to take place; I am sure at least it must have given some men, especially such as the ancient philosophers, an occasion to think a little more sensibly and worthily concerning the Divine nature, than it seems they did. Were this idea, as being of more importance to every man in particular, and to society in general, than all our other ideas, more universally clear and evident in all men, than ideas of sense, as for the same reason it ought also to be more unchangeable and indelible, I cannot conceive how it could have been possible for whole sects of philosophers to deny the very being of a God, and for Veninus, Jornandes Bruno, Casimir Liszinski, and Mahomet Effendi, to die martyrs to Atheism. No man, who can see clearly, denies the existence of a house, or tree, placed directly before him in broad daylight; and if God were as strongly and evidently apprehended by the mind of every man, previous to all informa-

tion and deduction of reason, as by your hypothesis he ought to be, if not more evidently, how could he possibly disbelieve the being of a God? The certainty we have of sensible objects without us is upon the same footing with axioms and first principles. We can neither bring arguments for them, nor against them, because they convince the mind of their existence by their own light and evidence; whereas the existence of God may be proved by reasons, nay, and opposed by arguments capable of convincing some; which could never happen, were it rendered self-evident by an idea stronger and clearer in the mind of every man than his sensible ideas of outward objects. A man confined to a dungeon all his days, and deprived of all conversation with mankind, would, I am afraid, be but a sorry sort of a divine. As he could neither receive the idea of God from instruction, nor collect it from his works, I cannot help thinking he could not so much as once consider who made him, whether ever he was made or not, nor entertain the least notion of God.

Dech. You may be of that opinion; but you can never be sure it would so happen, since you have no experience of such a fact to argue from.

Shep. But I have many experiments as good, of people born absolutely deaf and blind, who never shewed the least sense of religion, or knowledge of God.

Temp. That is a full proof. Their bodies, destitute of those two senses, were effectual dungeons to their minds. But might not a man, in the full exercise of reason, and enjoyment of all his senses, prove to himself, from the works of creation, the existence of God?

Shep. Do you think it possible by our senses to receive an idea of God, as we do of outward and sensible objects?

Temp. No; a spirit cannot be the object of any sense; but by our senses we can perceive his works, and by our reason trace his being from thence, as we do other causes by their effects.

Dech. There is nothing more certain. Every effect supposes a cause: and when the highest degree of wisdom and goodness discovers itself in the effects, we cannot help believing the cause to be infinitely wise and good. If the effects are such as no finite power could have produced, we

must also suppose the cause to be infinitely powerful. There is a strict alliance and conformity between all causes and their effects. Nothing can produce nothing. That which is foolish and weak, betrays its folly and weakness in its works; and that which is wise and powerful in a limited degree, can only demonstrate a limited degree of wisdom and power in its productions or operations. Now the works of creation demonstrate infinite wisdom and power, and therefore their cause must be infinitely wise and powerful. This is an easy demonstration for the being of a God; and as it is obvious to every capacity, so it conveys to the meanest understanding a right idea of the Divine nature, in respect to such attributes as have any relation to our duty.

Shep. It is one thing to work out the demonstration of a point once it is proposed, and another to strike upon the point itself. I cannot tell whether any man would have considered the works of creation as effects, if he had never been told they have a cause. We know very well, that even after the being of such a cause was much talked of in the world, and believed by the generality of mankind; yet many and great philosophers held the world to be eternal; and others ascribed what we call the works of creation to an eternal series of causes. If the most sagacious of the philosophers were capable of doing this, after hearing so much of the first cause, and a creation, what would they have done, and what would the gross of mankind, who are inattentive and ignorant, have thought of the matter, if nothing had been taught concerning God and the origin of things, but every single man left solely to such intimation as his own senses and reason could have given him? The proofs *a priori* for the reality of a first cause, suppose them convincing, are, however, exceeding metaphysical and refined, and fitter to come in the rear of a long inquiry about the production of the world, than to lead the way. And, accordingly, we find the earlier ages of the world made use of no such arguments; nay, did not so much as trouble themselves about the question, and either never inquired into it, or took their opinions upon that head merely from tradition. But, allowing that every man is able to demonstrate to himself, that the world, and all things contained therein, are effects, and

had a beginning, which I take to be a most absurd supposition, and look upon it to be almost impossible for unassisted reason to go so far; yet if effects are, according to your argument, to be ascribed to similar causes, and a good and wise effect must suppose a good and wise cause; by the same way of reasoning, all the evil and irregularity in the world must be attributed to an evil and unwise cause; so that either the first cause must be both good and evil, wise and foolish, or else there must be two first causes, an evil and irrational, as well as a good and wise principle. Thus man, left to himself, would be apt to reason. If the cause and its effects are similar and comformable, matter must have a material cause, there being nothing more impossible for us to conceive, than how matter should be produced by spirit, or any thing else but spirit. The best reasoner in the world, endeavouring to find out the causes of things by the things themselves, and proceeding on the soundest maxims of philosophy, on which you found your argument, might be led into the grossest errors and contradictions, and find himself, at the end, in extreme want of an instructor. To argue *a priori* on this subject, is little better than nonsense; and the argument *a posteriori* leads to such difficulties, as mere reason is, at least in most men, unable to dissipate. Is the first cause good, wise, and powerful?

Dech. Yes; the effects produced by it demonstrate this.

Shep. Is it infinitely so?

Dech. Undoubtedly; for no being, endowed with a less degree of those attributes, could have given being, form, variety, and harmony, to the universe.

Shep. Does not the evil observed in the world suppose a bad cause?

Dech. I don't know but it may.

Shep. You will not, I believe, ascribe an evil effect to a good cause. And pray how comes it to pass, that the good cause, being infinitely wise and powerful, does not subdue the evil cause, and totally prevent its effects?

Dech. I believe it would have been better to have denied the reality of evil.

Shep. That cannot be done. Our own existence is not more evident, than that pain, sickness, death, &c. to say nothing of immoralities, are evils. All mankind dread and

shun them, unless when the fear of greater evils compels them to do otherwise. Is it true, then, that good and evil have their distinct empires, and bound each other? And is the principle, from whence the one is derived, to be feared, as well as the author of the other to be loved? Is not fear a cause of adoration, as well as love? Are two opposite and supreme principles, therefore, to be worshipped, according to the belief of almost all the Pagans now in the world? If the mere reason of every man could relieve itself from this difficulty, why should the worship of devils prevail in so many nations, and keep its ground during so long a series of ages? This, I think, is evident, that although reason should be so strong in one man, or in a few, as to find out the being of some superior power, yet this would not, probably, happen, till after many ages spent in vain attempts to account for the origin and regularity of the world; and when some notion of this kind should once be struck out, it would be so imperfect, so uncertain, and blended with so much absurdity and error, that it would scarcely be worth the propagating, which would be also a matter of infinite difficulty. But supposing it to prevail in some nations, or all over the world having once preoccupied the minds of men, the improvements made by others in after-times on the first imperfect discovery, instead of having the notions, derived from that discovery, as a basis to build on, would find them, and the prejudices accompanying them, an infinite obstacle to their propagation. What is said of the first improvement, would be as true of all the subsequent ones. The old notions would be so many bars against the new; and, considering the great difficulty of the inquiry, and the vast room for conceit and imagination to graft their wild scions on the fruitful stock, it would require an almost infinite number of debates, refinements, and improvements, each of which must have a course through the world before they could be examined, in order to settle the right idea of God, and support it with demonstration universally convincing. Reason labours under a yet greater difficulty in finding out the right notion of God. Reason, if I be not mistaken, is that faculty by which we form propositions out of ideas already conceived, and laying those together, the terms of which have a necessary and self-evident connexion

or dissonance, draw conclusions from thence. It is that power of the mind by which we hold, as it were, the light of clear and incontestable truths to dark and disputable questions, and endeavour by that means to discover on which side of the latter we ought to fix our assent. He whose ideas of things represent their objects in true and determinate lights, and whose faculty of reason is strong and clear, is called a judicious man. When this faculty is properly and judiciously exercised on a knowable proposition, the result should be called right reasoning, rather than right reason. As the office of reason is not to supply the mind with ideas, but to judge of the connexion or disagreement between those already received ; so it can only exercise itself on such materials, as those other faculties, that hold intelligence with objects, supply it with. This latter is the function of the senses alone, which, for that purpose, are turned outward towards their proper objects, and set open as so many avenues and inlets to the ingredients of all our knowledge. It is vain to say we have any proper or immediate idea of spirit, and its operations, or that we have any other source of notions than sensation. If ' Brown's Procedure and Extent of the Understanding' had not clearly demonstrated this, the trials every man may make in his own mind would do it effectually. When we look into ourselves with a sharp and unprejudiced eye, we plainly perceive spirit represented there analogically by our idea of some subtile matter, its operations by those of body, and both, not only in our external, but internal speech, by terms and signs appropriated to sensible objects. If then all our ideas are derived from sensation, if reason can operate no farther than it hath ideas to work on, and if the Divine Being is not the object of any one sense, how much at a loss must reason be to fix our way of thinking concerning that which it is furnished with no idea of ?

Dech. Were this argument of yours capable of proving any thing, it would prove too much for your purpose, and reduce us to absolute Atheism, through an impossibility of forming any idea of God.

Shep. I did not say, sir, that it was impossible to form any idea of God ; but only, that reason, left to itself, having no power of its own to form any ideas at all, and being

supplied with ideas to work on only through the senses, could hardly form a right idea of God. This, however, it might be enabled to do by him who taught it to believe, that the soul of man is formed in the image of God; and that as we represent our souls to our conceptions by a similitude or analogy to matter, so we ought to represent him in our thoughts by the analogy between him and our souls. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, is the soul of man of the same nature with God?

Dech. I think it would be too bold to say it is.

Shep. It would not only be too bold, but impious and absurd. There is certainly an infinite difference of nature between the uncreated omnipresent Spirit, and even the highest order of angels. It follows, therefore, that in thinking of God we are forced to help ourselves out by similitude, which, till it was revealed to us, the force of human reason could not give us a right notion, not to say assurance, of. But now that this resemblance between God and ourselves is discovered to us, we can lay the foundations of our knowledge here on earth, and raise the superstructure above the highest heavens. When you speak of reason, Mr. Dechaine, and represent it as able easily to find out God, you deceive yourself for want of considering the vast difference between reason uninstructed, undisciplined, and unfurnished with spiritual ideas, and reason already refined by divine and human culture. All mankind reason, not only in proportion to the various strength of their reasoning faculties, but according also to the store of materials laid in to reason on, and the various degrees of care and skill employed in training up their several faculties to a habit or art of perceiving, recollecting, and reasoning. The bodies and minds of men are so contrived, as to stand in need of our continual care and culture. The nourishment of the first, and its health, depend upon the arts of raising food from the earth, and preparing it for use; of providing clothes, building houses, keeping ourselves clean, using medicines on occasion, &c. Its graceful carriage depends also on art, and we want to be taught how to sit, stand, walk, and dispose of our arms and hands in a becoming manner. As to the mind, it stands in equal need of skill and management. It comes into the world igno-

rant, and, what is worse, rude, and prone to wild passions, and fierce dispositions. We have not even the full use of our senses, till art and culture have taught us how to employ them. The eye, of itself, can give us no measure of distance, a thing in which we are greatly concerned. The carrying it to an eminence, to give us a view of an approaching enemy, the preventing the judgment from being imposed on by it, when it represents a direct object, placed in two mediums of different densities, as crooked, when looking through improper mediums, it shews objects in false colours and sizes, when it exhibits a near hill as larger than a distant mountain, with many other cases of the like nature, made part of the art of seeing, and shews us, that, the eye being but an instrument, we stand in need of a higher faculty to direct us in its use. The same may be said in respect to all our other senses. The imagination, which is subject to great irregularities, requires much skill to attach it to proper objects, to confine it within due bounds, to assist it in forming its assemblages of ideas, and so to refine and exalt it, that due force and dignity may be given to the impressions made on it. The memory likewise wants great exercise and improvement, to make it a ready and effectual instrument to the judgment. Much depends on duly classing and regulating the notions stored up in it, that its materials may be presented to reason in a clear order and method. The laying up of our ideas, as it were, in distinct apartments; the retaining them with firmness, and recollecting them with readiness, depend exceedingly on management and habit. Reason, which is the faculty by which we are rendered teachable, and the very organ, if I may so say, of docility, stands extremely in need of instruction and exercise, though the under faculties of the mind should supply it ever so plentifully and methodically with the materials on which it is to operate. You may lay a sufficient quantity of excellent stone, timber, &c. on the spot where you intend to build; yet, if your architect wants taste and skill, he will give you but an indifferent house. Reason, before it is exercised and trained to its office, wants penetration and discernment to distinguish a real and natural connexion of ideas from a seeming and unnatural one, wants attention to keep it close to the point

in question, and strength to pursue a long series of arguments commencing at the question, and leading the assent round to the conclusion. If the philosophers had not thought reason wanted assistance, they had never been at the trouble to contrive instruments and rules to regulate its operations.

Dech. In my opinion, you might as well talk of teaching a man to hunger and thirst, as to see and reason. Those philosophers who contrived rules and instruments for reasoning, had, I believe, nothing else in view than to reduce the world to such a way of reasoning, as might best serve to recommend the systems they had invented, which were often too extraordinary to be approved of, if the disciple was not first artificially trained to a like method of reasoning with that of the philosopher. This gave birth to all the jargon of the ancient and modern schools, and it was found necessary to lay it aside, before the learned world could recover a just or intelligible way of reasoning.

Shep. The application of a wrong or defective remedy to a disorder, does by no means prove that there is no such disorder. If most men reason wrong, as it is plain they do, and on no subjects more remarkably than those of religion; it were certainly a thing much to be wished, that they were taught to reason better. Men who live in times and places of ignorance, hardly reason at all, and are little better than brutes, in comparison of such as have been bred up in ages and countries well enlightened. Uneducated and illiterate men are able to reason on few points, and those such as relate to their daily occupations and affairs; even men of the greatest abilities and learning, not only reason variously and contrarily on the same questions, but conceive differently of reason itself. Hobbes, in his Levia. part i. chap. 5, undertakes to define the faculty of reason, and absurdly gives a most whimsical definition of the mere act, drawn from the etymology of the word. He says, 'It is reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon for the marking and signifying our thoughts.'

Dech. That is, indeed, a most wild definition.

Shep. Cumberland defines right reason to be 'affirmation and negation, according to the real nature of things.'

Dech. That comes nearer to the matter.

Shep. Yet that is neither a definition of reason, considered as a faculty of the mind, nor as an act.

Dech. Is it not a definition of the act of right reasoning?

Shep. I think not. The whole act of reasoning, whether right or wrong, is over, before we either affirm or deny any thing; or if it is not, we affirm or deny without having reasoned. This definition gives us no idea of the extent or power of reason, and therefore can be of no use in our present inquiry. Tindal says, 'When we attribute any operation to reason, as distinguishing between truth and falsehood, &c. we mean by it the rational faculties;' and by the 'rational faculties' he means, the natural ability to apprehend, judge, and infer. Here he absurdly puts apprehension into the definition of reason; whereas apprehension is that distinct faculty by which we previously receive the ideas afterward to be reasoned on, or perceive the truth of self-evident propositions, from which the faculty of reason, by a distinct and subsequent act, is to draw conclusions. Apprehension, therefore, whose office it is by the senses, and a simple act of the mind, to furnish reason with the materials, can neither be reason itself, nor a part of reason. We do not say a man reasons, when he sees or hears, nor when he apprehends the truth of a self-evident proposition, such as, that the whole is greater than any of its parts. Thus men much used to reasoning, and extremely apt to magnify their own reason, speak as differently of it, as if they had quite different faculties. Reason, as commonly taken by controversial writers, is the faculty; whereas it is the act which for the most part they define. But in the present debate it is our business to consider the faculty alone, that we may see whether, either by its office or power, it is able to furnish us with a right idea of God. Now nothing can be more evident, than that it furnishes the mind with no ideas; that it can only perform its office so far as it is supplied by other faculties with ideas; and that, even when it is, it stands extremely in need of instruction how to manage its materials. As to Tindal's definition of the act of reason, it is only a long account of the manner by which, in his opinion, we receive our ideas, and how we apprehend the truth of self-evident propositions, and from

thence deduce demonstrations or probabilities. In order to make reason the faculty, by which God judges and acts, as well as man, he makes intuition a part of reason, and confounds the one with the other; from whence he draws consequences afterward, and those in the words of our divines, extremely prejudicial to revealed religion.

Temp. Pray, Mr. Shepherd, in what do you make the mere act of reasoning to consist? And when may we be said to reason rightly?

Shep. As to the act of reason, it is the drawing conclusions from premises, and is said to be right when those conclusions are rightly drawn from right premises. Yet, in my opinion, reason does her office well, when she draws her conclusions rightly from the best lights she hath, though those lights should deceive her. It is the business of the senses, experience, and instruction, to furnish reason with right ideas and principles; and hers, to draw right conclusions from thence. Till she receives notices, she cannot operate at all. If the notices are imperfect or false, though she performs her part ever so well, she must unavoidably run into errors. Although the notices she receives should be right and perfect, yet she may draw the conclusions imperfectly or falsely; for there is such a thing as wrong reasoning. As to the faculty of reason, which is what Tindal, and all others, who pretend to consider the extent and power of the mind in beating out truths, ought to have defined, it is that ability of the soul, by which in her present state, with the help of certain organs of the brain, she draws conclusions from premises; in other words, the faculty of judging. It is of no use in this, or any other controversy that I know of about reason, to determine whether the soul hath only one simple power, which in one instance perceives, and in another judges; or whether she hath distinct powers for these distinct offices; because the effects and extent of reasoning may be in either case the same. In our present frame the bodily organs are evidently made necessary, not only to the introduction of notices, but also to the examination and use of them after they are introduced. It is also manifest enough from experience, that distinct organs are set apart for the several operations of the mind. The souls of men are generally confessed to be all equal and unchangeable;

but the soul of one man receives clearer notices, and reasons better from them, than the soul of another. Which difference can arise from nothing else, but some difference in the organs, by which apprehension and reason operate. Nay, even in the same man one faculty exerts itself with more force and clearness than another; and we frequently see persons, who have the use of one or two powers of the mind, while the rest seem almost, or totally, obliterated. Some madmen apprehend and imagine with great strength, and reason not at all. In sleep the imagination and memory are extremely active, while the judgment is wholly suspended. Fevers and blows on the head frequently impair or destroy one faculty, and leave the rest entire or little hurt. The soul, however, is still the same, and her peculiar power or powers unchanged. So is she through all the stages of life; and yet we see the exercise of her powers grow and decline with the body. Shut up all the senses, and reason cannot at all exert herself for want of materials to work with. Open one sense, and she can operate on the ideas of that class, but no other. Open a second, and her stock being enlarged, she expatiates in a new field of knowledge; and so on, but not perfectly, till the organs or instruments, by which she operates, are come to full maturity and strength, which are acquired by the same methods exactly with the strength of a hand or leg, that is, by natural growth and exercise. The leg of a child is not so strong and active as that of a full-grown man, or that of an indolent person so supple and elastic as that of a rope-dancer. Nay, exercise in one thing does not produce a perfect agility in another. It is just so in those nearer organs, by which the soul apprehends, recollects, and judges. They vegetate and grow by degrees; use and exercise give them a great part of the strength with which they operate; and exercise and application, properly managed, give them force and expertness in one branch of knowledge, without much advancing their power in others.

Dech. It follows from the theory, that the body and matter think, recollect, and reason, as well as the soul.

Shep. By no means. Although in our present state it is evident, that thought, memory, and judgment, are the result of mind and matter organized, yet it is only the soul that performs these operations by the use of bodily organs. It

is not the hatchet, that fells the tree, nor the compasses, that sweep the circle; it is he who wields and employs those instruments.

Dech. The soul, when stripped from the body, can neither think, nor recollect, cannot reason. This seems strange doctrine for the mouth of a divine.

Shep. If the soul, in any case, or at any time, is totally divested of all material organs, though she will then exercise such powers as are peculiar to herself, she will neither have ideas, nor recollect, nor reason. Her operations will be strictly analogous to her present acts, but not of the same kind; so that it may be said with truth, but not in the immediate and proper sense of the word, that she shall think, &c. after her separation from the body. We say with truth, that God is wise and just; but surely we do not mean, that his wisdom operates at all as ours does, on sensible ideas, and in long deductions of reason. Is his justice determined by law and obligation, like ours? We are relative beings, and our duty arises from the situation we are placed in. But duty and relation cannot be applied to God, who is above all the laws of his creature, makes, repeals, or dispenses with them, as he thinks fit; and when he varies the relations and conditions of men, of kingdoms, of worlds, causes new, nay and opposite rules of duty do result from thence. The essence of human justice consists in a conformity to the law, by which the actions of men ought to be regulated. Who sees not, that when those laws are removed, and the determinations of a Being, superior to all law, come to be considered, justice cannot be predicated of that being essentially in the same sense it is of men? Our nature is different from, and infinitely inferior to, that of God. Tindal says, 'Our reason for kind, though not for degree, is of the same nature with God's, and that it is by reason that we are the image of God.' He says much the same in respect to justice, and that 'God and man are bound by the same law.' But this, instead of making man the image of God, will make him, as Dr. Brown hath well observed, a God in miniature. Man is only formed in the likeness of the Divine nature; but is no more divine, than the image or picture of a man is human.

Dech. What notions then can we have of God, or his attributes?

Shep. Such a one as serves all our purposes perfectly well. We know, for instance, that he is wise, and attentive to all our thoughts, words and actions, although we are sure he does not perceive and attend in the same manner we do. We know likewise, that he is just; and that although justice in him be of a different kind from justice in us, yet, as our God and governor, he will equitably judge us by the laws he hath given us. This is sufficient; and to look farther is folly and presumption.

Dech. And pray, doctor, how will the soul of man be conscious of its former good or evil actions, upon your hypothesis, after death?

Shep. I did not say the soul after death will retain no material vehicle. If I had, I must have said more than either reason or Scripture authorizes. Besides, the very soul itself may retain the impressions of its former virtues or vices in a way distinct from memory; or, by the help of analogy, look back into this mixed condition, as it now looks forward into the world of spirits. It may see its former actions in the records of God, and by all or any of these, or other means unknown to us, be conscious of its former good or evil actions. Be that as it will, what you call an hypothesis, is too evident to experience to be denied. It is, I think, manifest enough from what hath been said, that reason receives all her ideas from other faculties, and stands greatly in need of instruction in order to the right performance of her own office; but most of all, when she is to weigh propositions, and draw conclusions about objects, that are only to be analogically apprehended and considered. The mind of man imports its rules of reasoning, as well as notions, from abroad; and one generation teaches another, not only religion, but all other sciences. The art of reasoning rightly, follows instruction, and is progressive and traditional. We can trace it from Syria to Egypt, from Egypt to Greece, from Greece to Italy, and from thence westward and northward to the rest of Europe; while all the other nations of the earth, excepting the Chinese, who made but little advances in knowledge, lying without the verge of right religious instruction, remained profoundly ignorant. Reason in them, not meeting with opportunities of culture, and the seeds of knowledge, lay fallow, and produced little or no inventions, and

scarcely any improvement in arts and sciences. No country, that we know of, ever became ingenious and learned, from barbarous and ignorant, merely of themselves. In all countries, we have any acquaintance with, knowledge bears an exact proportion to instruction. Why does the learned, and well-educated, reason better than the mere citizen? Why the citizen better than the boor? Why the English boor better than the Spanish? Why the Spanish better than the Moorish? Why the Moorish better than the Negro? And why does he reason more expertly than the Hottentot? If then reason is found to go hand in hand, and step for step, with education, what would be the consequence, if there were no education? There is no fallacy more gross, than to imagine reason utterly untaught and undisciplined, capable of the same attainments in knowledge with reason refined and well-instructed; or to suppose, that reason can as easily find itself in principles to argue from, as draw the consequences, once they are found; I mean especially in respect to objects not perceivable by our senses. In ordinary articles of knowledge, our senses and experience furnish reason with ideas and principles to work on; and continual conferences and debates give it exercise in such matters; and that improves its vigour and activity. But, in respect to God, it can have no right idea nor axiom to set out with, till he is pleased to reveal them to it.

Temp. It is too manifest to be disputed, that a man left wholly to himself, and utterly untaught, would reason very imperfectly, if at all. But, as you observed just now, men in their inquiries and debates sharpen and teach one another to reason; and once they have attained to the right use of their faculties, I cannot see what should hinder them from employing those faculties in the contemplation of effects and causes; and if no man should form an imperfect idea of the cause or causes of all things, another might improve on his discovery, a third on his, and so on, till the right idea of the one first cause might be found out.

Shep. This might possibly happen; but how long it might be before reason itself could be sufficiently improved in many or most men for an inquiry after the first cause or causes of things, and how many ages must pass, after this improve-

ment could be made, ere all doubts and uncertainties could be cleared up, and the right idea of God be found out and fixed; and then what an immense space of time it would take to propagate the right idea over all the world, against the current of all its received errors, and rooted prejudices, without miracles and without a ministry, let every candid person judge. What must mankind do all this time for want of a divine law and obligation, the absolute necessity of which we have already considered? Besides, gentlemen, if I mistake not, mankind are full as apt to degenerate, as improve in religious knowledge. I am sure we have fewer instances of the latter than the former, in such ages and countries as were not kept in sight of the true religion by a continual series of revelations. If we give credit to the Jewish and Christian history, we shall be convinced, that all the nations of the world at first knew and served the true God, and fell from his worship, in process of time, to that of idols and devils, except the Jews, who were with the greatest difficulty restrained from doing the same, by revelations, miracles, and national judgments; and the Christians, whom the clearest lights have not altogether preserved from the encroachments of idolatry. But as this track of history is of little or no authority with you, Mr. Dechaine, be so good as to shew us, from what history you please, an instance of any one nation under the sun, that emerged from absolute atheism or idolatry, into the knowledge or adoration of the one true God, without the assistance of revelation. The Americans, the Africans, the Tartars, and the ingenious Chinese, have had time enough, one would think, to find out the true and right idea of God, which you say is more evident to all mankind, than any idea of sense; and yet, after above five thousand years improvement upon the innate ideas of God, and the full exercise of reason, which you exalt, and almost deify, they have at this day got no farther in their progress towards the true religion, than to the worship of stocks, stones, and devils. How many thousand years must be allowed to these nations, to reason themselves into the true religion, by Mr. Dechaine and our other Deists, who insist, that this religion is evident to all men, in all ages and countries? The Christian religion, it

seems, came too late into the world, to be true; but natural religion, though not yet arrived, is recommended sufficiently by its truth, antiquity, and universality. What the lights of nature and reason could do to investigate the knowledge of God, is best seen by what they have really done. We cannot argue more convincingly on any foundation, than that of known and incontestable facts. Give me leave therefore to be particular in exposing the theology of the pagans from the records of their own writers. All the nations of the earth, that were left to themselves, fell, some sooner, and others later, into gross idolatry. At first they worshipped the luminaries of heaven, and then their departed kings and benefactors, for gods. Then they made images for them, and in a little time terminated the greater part of their adoration in those wooden representatives of their dead deities. It was not long after these first-fruits of nature, till they added to the catalogue of their gods, the most barbarous oppressors, the vilest impostors, the lewdest prostitutes, and the most infamous adulterers, murderers, and parricides, the earth ever groaned under. Such deities were to be worshipped with suitable rights and sacrifices. The Salii and Corybantes, priests of Mars and Cybele, performed the ceremonies of those deities with frantic dances, and outrageous fits of madness. In the rites of Bacchus, not only the priests, but all the people, men, women, and children, having their faces smeared with the lees of wine, and being half-drunk, ran about the fields, and through the woods, in a most horrible fit of distraction, howling like wild beasts, and frisking from place to place with such ridiculous and immodest gesticulations, as nothing but the strong possession of some demon could have prompted them to. It was no doubt, a most rational kind of religion, that could have put the ancient men, the discreet matrons, and the modest virgins, on such wild extravagancies. The sight of such a ceremony was, I must own, wonderfully decent and solemn, and its tendency highly edifying and virtuous. Much the same sort of friskings and howlings were used in the ceremonies of many other heathen gods; and in those of Baal they were accompanied with a custom most shocking and unnatural. The priests, as they capered about the altar, gashed their flesh with knives and lancets, and ran into furious fits of distraction.

The most solemn act of worship, performed to the Syrian Baal by his ordinary devotees, was to break wind, and ease themselves, at the foot of his image. The religious rites performed in honour of Venus in Cyprus, and at Aphac on Mount Libanus, consisted in lewdness of the grossest kinds. The young people of both sexes crowded from all parts to those sinks of pollution, and, filling the groves and temples with their shameless practices, committed whoredom by thousands, out of pure devotion. All the Babylonian women were obliged to prostitute themselves once in their lives, at the temple of Venus or Mylitta, to the first man that asked them; and the money earned by this extraordinary act of devotion, be it more or less, was always esteemed sacred. The nocturnal mysteries at Rome were not carried to such enormous excesses; but they were nevertheless very scandalous meetings, and gave occasion to all sorts of debaucheries. The devils, however, whom nature had chosen for her gods, were not contented with drunkenness and lewdness; they must be worshipped with murder too, and that of the most shocking sort. Human sacrifices were offered up almost in all the heathen countries; and, to make them the more acceptable to their good-natured gods, the parents burned their own children alive to Baal, Moloch, and many other of their deities. Here in Britain, and in Gaul, it was a common practice to surround a man with a kind of wicker-work, and burn him to death, in honour of their gods. The Scythians sacrificed to Mars one in every hundred of the captives taken in war. The Peruvians, in their sacrifices, had a custom of tying a living man to a stake, and pulling the flesh off his bones by small pieces, which they broiled and eat in his sight, believing they did him the greatest honour in treating him after this manner. The Carthaginians, in times of public calamity, not only burnt alive the children of the best families to Saturn, and that by hundreds, but sometimes sacrificed themselves in the same manner in great numbers. Oracles, astrology, soothsaying, superstition, magic, &c. overran the whole heathen world, and presided over the very councils of the wisest states. The gods of the heathens are, on all occasions, represented by their own worshippers, as envious of human happiness. This might be made appear by a great variety of quotations from pro-

fane writers, who often speak on that topic just as Amasis did in his famous letter to Polycrates. If in this they gave a true character of their gods, it shews those gods were devils. A female divinity was always remarkable for her spleen, and never failed to be revenged, if any one, when he made an entertainment for the rest of the gods, happened to forget her in his invitation. If nature is left to contrive gods for herself, they must be like herself, and subject to the same passions and infirmities. Such were the bright rays of natural light! Such the blessed effects in pagan countries to this day, of following the wise dictates of nature! What the Romans thought of their gods, may be seen by their behaviour on the death of Germanicus. They battered the temples, says Suetonius, with stones, they overthrew the altars of the gods, and flung their household deities into the streets. Le Compte and Duhald assure us, the Chinese, after offering largely to their gods, and being disappointed of their assistance, sometimes sue them for damages, and obtain decrees against them from the mandarins. This ingenious people, when their houses are on fire, to the imminent peril of their wooden gods, hold them to the flames, in hopes of an effect, that might be more rationally expected from a small vessel of water. A religion, so highly respected, must, no doubt, have excellent effects upon the morality of its professors, and powerfully enforce the laws of society. However, I do not think it reasonable to expect much piety from people towards gods of their own manufacture. What notion do you imagine a statuary must have had of religion, when he was labouring to give Jupiter that awful look, and those eye-brows, with which he was to attract devotion; or when he was giving a Venus those charms, by which he supposed she had engaged the affections of Mars, Adonis, Anchises, and the rest of her gallants? I wish Lucian had given us an auction of the gods. It was natural for him to have taken the hint from some real auction of the kind, in which he might have seen a complete set of household deities canted to the highest bidder, and carried away for very trifling sums, as gods of little value, since they could not protect the family, to whom they formerly belonged, from distress, and the necessity of selling all they had. It would certainly have been a very sur-

prising sight to one of us, to have seen a person, whom we knew to be a man of sober mind and good sense in other things, going to a shop to cheapen gods, and differing with the workman for a penny in the price of a Jupiter. The Tyrians were a wise people, and therefore when Alexander laid siege to their city, they chained Apollo to Hercules to prevent his giving them the slip. If the ingenious Mr. Dechaine had lived in Egypt, during its wonderful fertility of gods, I cannot but think how religiously he would have fed the canine object of his worship with the savoury discharge of his own bowels, and then immediately fallen on his knees to adore him. The priestcraft of Christianity is that alone which hath blinded his eyes, and hindered his natural light from pointing out this elegant kind of worship to him.

Dech. Pr'ythee, parson, observe a little decency, if not in respect to the company, yet at least out of regard to the subject. If we are to deal in such suppositions, I can easily enough guess what would have been the consequence, had the pious Mr. Shepherd, instead of a demure and sanctified Christian parson, been a priest of the Cyprian Venus. I cannot help laughing within myself, when I consider how powerfully his warmth of heart and zeal would have exerted themselves on the great festivals of the goddess, and how ably he would have defended the positive institution celebrated on those occasions.

Shep. I must own, the morality of all men will ever be of a piece with their religion. That was the case with the heathens, who never thought themselves obliged to be better than their gods; and accordingly did not only indulge their lusts and appetites out of principle, but ran into general customs of the most horrid and abominable nature, having nothing in their religion to restrain them. Fornication was esteemed no sin among them; nor did they commit sodomy with half the shame or remorse that attend wenching among Christians. They exposed such of their children, as they did not like, to be eaten by wild beasts; a cruelty practised at this day by the Hottentots, and some other African nations. Several nations, inhabiting the banks of the Danube, were wont to fling their new-born children into the river, and those only that swam were taken out and

suckled. The Caribes frequently castrated their children, that they might grow the fatter, and be the more delicate food. The politest of them were entertained at their public shows, with men killing men, and their fellow-creatures engaged in horrible encounters with lions and tigers. Some nations of them eat human flesh, which is a kind of diet, if we may believe our travellers, much relished by several pagan nations at this day. Others, such were their notions of filial piety, killed their parents at a certain age, and feasted on their flesh, thinking it the greatest tenderness to relieve them from the miseries of old age; and the highest honour that could be done them, to entomb them in their own bowels. It was a custom in most of the eastern nations, and, they say, is sometimes practised at this day, for her, who loved her husband more than the rest of his wives, to kill herself at his funeral. The Persians made no scruple of marrying their own mothers or daughters, a thing more abhorred, than even murder itself, by other nations; and it was lawful among the Egyptians for brother and sister to marry.

Dech. These moral enormities, practised by whole nations, can never serve your purpose, because they were neither agreeable to nature, nor dictated by it, but the mere effects of custom, education, and priestcraft.

Shep. I cannot see what profit any species of priests could have derived from the greater part of these practices; but I shall freely own they were the effects of custom and education. Yet, on the other hand, you must confess, that if the light of nature had as clearly and uniformly shewn every man his duty on all occasions, as his eye shews him the differences between colours, as Tindal says it must have done, no man, or at least no body of men, could have ever given into such enormities, much less considered them as acts of piety and duty. Those nations never mistook white for black, nor blue for yellow; never, in open daylight, took a horse for a tree, or a tree for a man; who carried out their sick, as soon as they thought their case desperate, and threw them on the ground to perish by the injuries of the wind and weather; who forced their wives to miscarry, in order to save the expense of maintaining their children; whose women, in the fury of a battle, flung

their infants on the lances of their enemies, to terrify them with a dreadful idea of their resolution. We hear much said of the exalted virtue shewn by some ancient heathens; but as they had no religious principles to support their virtue, it is to be suspected they only wore it for show, and to get a name. Revenge and self-murder were not only tolerated, but esteemed heroic by the very best of them. I know not, in all profane history, six more illustrious characters, than those of Lycurgus, Timoleon, Cicero, Cato Uticensis, Brutus, and Germanicus. The first encouraged tricking and stealing by an express law. The second, upon principle, murdered his own brother. Cicero, with all his fine talk about religion and virtue, had very little of either; as may appear by what he says (I think it is in a letter to Atticus) on the death of his daughter Tullia; 'I hate the very gods, who have hitherto been so profuse in their favours to me;' and by deserting his friends and his country, and turning a servile flatterer to Cæsar. Brutus concludes all his mighty heroism with this exclamation; 'Virtue, I have pursued thee in vain, and found thee to be but an empty name;' and then kills himself. Cato's virtue was not strong enough to hinder his turning a public robber and oppressor, witness his Cyprian expedition; nor to bear up against the calamities of life, and so he cut his own throat, and ran away, like a coward, from his country and the world. Germanicus, who exceeded all men in natural sweetness of temper, at the approach of death called his friends about him, and spent his last moments in pressing them to take revenge of Piso and Plancina, for poisoning or bewitching him, in directing them how this might best be done, and in receiving their oaths for the performance of his request. His sense of religion he thus expressed on that occasion: 'Had I died by the decree of fate, I should have had just cause of resentment against the gods, for hurrying me away from my parents, my wife, and my children, in the flower of my youth, by an untimely death.' Here is an instance of piety and humanity, such as the best of natures, left to itself, was able to produce. How infinitely above this was the spirit and temper of mind, with which Christianity enabled Stephen and the other primitive martyrs to carry towards their murderers, face to face, and in the very fact! Germanicus

was only persuaded, that Piso had bewitched him; and his suspicions seem to have been founded merely on superstition: 'There were found,' says Tacitus, 'on the ground, and in the walls, the relics of dead bodies, charms, incantations, leaden tablets with the name of Germanicus, and half-burnt embers smeared with gore, by which the souls of men are delivered over to the infernal gods.' This was all that appeared to have been done; and nothing but gross superstition could have induced Germanicus to ascribe his own death to such inefficacious means. Besides, he had cause only to suspect Piso and Plancina to be the authors of these practices, and upon that suspicion breathes out his soul in fury and revenge against them. But Stephen, acting upon a nobler principle, and with a more exalted spirit, sees his murderers about him, and, while they are flinging stones at him, is on his knees earnestly soliciting God to forgive them.

Dech. The best men, as well Christians as heathens, are sometimes guilty of the grossest vices; but we ought rather to trace their principles through their general virtues, than their particular failures.

Shep. What you call failures, were crimes of so black a nature, as men of real piety and virtue could hardly have been guilty of. But you ought to observe, sir, that the crimes I object to these heathen worthies, were committed on principle. If we were to make a catalogue of heathen enormities, perpetrated in violation of the feeble principles dictated by the light of nature, it would be too black for the humanity of a Christian, and too long for the patience of a Deist, to peruse. The thirty tyrants at Athens made the daughters dance in the blood of their murdered parents. Licinius Lucullus, contrary to express articles, put to death twenty thousand of the Caucæi. Galba, under a pretence of consulting about their common safety, assembled the inhabitants of three Spanish cities, of whom he massacred seven thousand. What monsters were the Roman emperors during paganism! Augustus, having made himself master of Perusia, offered up three hundred of the principal inhabitants at the altar of his uncle Julius. Nero, who had committed incest with his own mother, afterward murdered her with the most hideous circumstances of cruelty

and treachery; and, after bathing the city in the blood of its best citizens, he set it on fire, that it might exhibit in fact what he sung over its flames in his poem concerning the destruction of Troy. Caracalla killed his brother Geta in the arms of his mother, who, although she was wounded by the blow that dispatched her son, soon after tempted his murderer, by wanton allurements, to marry her, which he did; and because some citizens of Alexandria called him Œdipus, and her Jocasta, he marched his army through Asia and Syria, and entering their city with all the appearance of a mild and peaceable disposition, gave up its inhabitants to the sword; nor did he stop the massacre, till that spacious and populous city was reduced to a desert. It is with the greatest justice that we look on Tiberius, Caligula, Domitian, Commodus, Heliogabalus, and by far the greater number of those emperors, as devils, rather than men. Had not the ten dreadful persecutions, in which, by the most infernal tortures, they destroyed some millions of innocent and passive people, been exercised on Christians, you would have esteemed them the highest instances of cruelty, and wondered how either the light of nature, or the applauded benevolence of mankind, could have licensed so merciless and so tedious a scene of murder.

Dech. But you own these instances of cruelty were committed by the emperors against their own principles.

Shep. Their persecuting the Christians was an effect of regard for their own religion. It was to gratify Saturn, who castrated his father, and devoured his own children; it was to obtain the favour of Jupiter the adulterer, of Venus the whore, and of Mercury the thief, that they thus made war on their Maker, and on Jesus Christ, the author of purity and holiness. Their other flagitious practices were, probably, reproved by some inward sense of justice and humanity; and, possibly, by their very religion, absurd and diabolical as it was, in the main.

Dech. Yet the elder Romans were, by the influence of that very religion, kept within the strictest bounds of virtue.

Shep. Not by the influence of their religion, but by their customary temperance, and the limited power of each citizen. This appears from hence, that when luxury was once introduced, and their governors became absolute monarchs,

no ties of nature, no fear of their gods, had any influence over them: yet after this people had been, for many ages, steeped in the most execrable and outrageous vices, Christianity, in proportion as it prevailed, introduced a new face of things; insomuch that, when the emperors became Christians, such enormities, as I just now mentioned, were seldom or never heard of.

Temp. The emperors before and after Constantine were, indeed, a very different sort of men. Among the first there were but few good, among the latter few who were enormously wicked.

Shep. This experiment sets before our eyes a wide difference between the effects of Christian and pagan principles.

Dech. The former had satirists, the latter encomiasts, for historians.

Shep. The pagan emperors had pagan historians, the Christian had pagans, as well as believers; and, besides, had always an opposite party of Christian writers to deal with, who did not fail to censure them with sufficient freedom in their books; nay, some of them had holy men and hermits to reprove them for their faults to their faces, and bishops, who compelled them to do public penance for their crimes.

Dech. Kings and emperors are pretty much alike in all ages and countries, and under the influence of all religions. Politics and pleasure give them little time to mind the affair of religion, either internal or external The people are likewise led, as to their principles, by the documents of their priests; and, as to their practices, by the example of the great. But he who would know how far nature is qualified to render those who will attend to its dictates, and improve upon them, wise and good, must look for information on this head in the writings and lives of the ancient philosophers, with whom one of the greatest fathers of the Christian church wished to take his fate in another world.

Shep. I cannot help differing widely with that father, because, upon consulting the writings of the philosophers themselves, together with their lives and tenets, as given us by their own pagan historians, I find they knew little of true religion, and practised less. It was owing to the want of higher and better principles than the mere light of nature

and reason can suggest, that the ancient philosophers, who carried virtue as high as it was possible without divine assistance, fell into the gross enormities practised by the people they lived among. They made all the efforts human strength was capable of, to find out the true object of worship, and came nearer to the discovery, in proportion as they had opportunities, by travelling into the east, of drawing hints from the stream of true tradition. And, after all, none but Socrates and Plato talked of one God, and that but obscurely, speaking, at other times, in favour of a plurality of gods, and recommending it to their disciples to worship the deities of their country. However, it must be owned they lived, in the main, as if they had better principles of religion than their countrymen and contemporaries. They did enough to shew, that if they had been well acquainted with the true religion, they would never have taken long journeys by land, and made dangerous voyages by sea, to visit the celebrated prostitutes of their time; they would never have let out their wives for hire, nor kept their misses, nor given the world the strongest reasons to think them guilty of greater crimes, than it was possible to commit with the other sex. What a condition must the pagan world have been in, when the ancient philosophers were esteemed by their contemporaries, as the wisest and best of men! Yet this must have been the case, or the youth of prime quality had never been committed to their tuition. Those philosophers, however, had, generally speaking, little sense of religion, and as little of moral virtue, or even decency. Many of them were Atheists, as Diagoras, Theodorus, and Critias. Epicurus denied the spirituality and providence of God, and so did all his followers. Aristotle denied his providence, as to this lower world. In the opinion of Hippasus and Heraclitus, God was fire; in that of Parmenides, a mixture of fire and earth; in that of Xenophanes, a great impassible sphere of matter. Socrates and Plato were, at least in practice, polytheists; so were Cicero and Plutarch, the latter holding, among a multiplicity of inferior gods, two supreme deities, the one infinitely good, the other infinitely evil. The Stoics believed God to be the soul of the world, and that soul to consist in a subtile flame. They likewise held, with the poets and the vulgar, that God is subject to

fate. Among the philosophers there were three hundred different opinions concerning their supreme deity, or rather, as Varro testifies, three hundred Jupiters, or supreme deities. The followers of Democritus and Epicurus denied the immortality of the soul. Pherecydes and Pythagoras believed it to be immortal, and gave it in common to brutes, as well as men. The Academics were doubtful, as to this important point. Socrates, Plato, and Cicero, who were more inclined to the belief of a future existence, than the other philosophers, plead for it with arguments of no force, speak of it with the utmost uncertainty, and therefore are afraid to found their system of duty and virtue on the expectation of it. Their notions of morality were of a piece with their religion, and had little else for a foundation than vain-glory. Tully, in his treatise of friendship, says, that virtue proposes glory as its end, and hath no other reward. Accordingly he maintains, that wars undertaken for glory, are not unlawful, provided they are carried on without the usual cruelty. Zeno maintained, that all crimes are equal; that pardon is never to be granted to one, who offends or injures us; and that a man may as lawfully use the utmost familiarity with his mother, as stroke her arm. It was not only his, but, likewise, the opinion of Cleanthes and Chrysippus, that the horrible sin of using the male for the female is a thing indifferent. The two former taught, that sons and daughters may as lawfully roast and eat of the flesh of their parents, as any other food. Diogenes, and the sect of the Cynics, held, that parents have a right to sacrifice and eat their children; and that there is nothing shameful in committing the grossest acts of lewdness publicly, and before the faces of mankind. Epicurus allows of cohabitation with mothers and daughters; Aristippus, although a man of fortune, refused to maintain his own children, regarding them only as the spittle or vermin produced by his body; and as he placed the happiness of a man in the pleasures of a brute, so, to indulge those pleasures, he said, a wise man might commit theft, sacrilege, or adultery, if he had an opportunity. The virtuous sentiments discovered by the philosophers on some occasions, will neither palliate these execrable principles, nor suffer us to think those who could abet them fit instructors for mankind.

Dech. It is not much matter what the philosophers uttered by way of speculation or emblem: the goodness of their lives is a sufficient voucher for the probity of their real principles.

Shep. The very covering of an emblem ought to be chaste and virtuous, lest those, who cannot penetrate to the kernel, should be poisoned by the shell. But that their principles were literally what I have represented them, their practices, which you so confidently appeal to, may fully prove. Plutarch represents Aristotle as a fop, a debauchee, and a traitor to Alexander his master. Dion Cassius is as severe on Seneca the moralist. Lucian, as well as Minutius Felix, represents the sages of antiquity as corrupters of youth, as adulterers and tyrants. Diogenes kept a filthy strumpet, with whom he lay openly in the streets. Speusippus was caught, and slain, in the act of adultery. Aristippus kept a seraglio of boys and whores, and yet took journeys, at the peril of his life, to see the reigning courtesans of his time; nor was lewdness his only vice; he actually forswore a sum of money deposited in his hands. Crates, and the female philosopher Hipparchia, made a practice of strolling from place to place, and lying together publicly before multitudes of people. Xenophon not only kept a boy, called Clinias, with whom he was guilty of unnatural pollutions, but practised the same execrable enormity with persons of riper years. Herillus was a filthy pathic in his youth; Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Zeno, Cleombrotus, and Menippus, committed murder on themselves; the last, because he had lost a considerable sum of money, which, as he was a usurer, went a little too near his heart. That I do not charge the philosophers with worse principles and practices than they themselves maintain, and their own pagan historians ascribe to them, any one may satisfy himself, who will consult Diogenes, Laertius, Sextus Empiricus, Lucian, Plutarch, and the works of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. Thus, gentlemen, I think it is plain, whether we consider what the human understanding could do, or what it actually did, that it could not have attained to a sufficient knowledge of God without revelation; so that the demonstration, brought in favour of some religion, ends in a demonstration of the revealed. When we attentively consider the nature of man,

we find it necessary he should have some religion; when we consider the nature of God, we cannot help concluding he would never have made a falsehood necessary to the happiness of his rational creatures; and that, therefore, there must be a true religion. And when we consider, that by our natural faculties it is extremely difficult to arrive at a right idea of God till he reveals it to us, that all the gentile world hath run into the grossest theological errors, and, in consequence of those, into the most enormous customs and crimes; and that no legislator ever founded his scheme of civil government on any supposed religious dictates of nature, but always on some real or pretended revelation; we cannot help ascribing all the true religion in the world to divine instruction, and all the frightful variety of religious errors to human invention, and to that dark and degenerate nature, by the imaginary light of which you believe the right idea of God may be easily and universally discovered.

Dech. I cannot give myself leave to think, that an infinitely gracious God could have brought a species of creatures into being, destined to be extremely miserable, if ignorant of their Maker, and yet, by nature, destitute of means to know him; or, that if he did, he could so long have withheld the external opportunities of that knowledge from them all, excepting one inconsiderable nation. I must confess, I have not credulity enough for such an article of faith a this.

Cunn. Nor I, indeed.

Temp. It seems very strange; yet flying to the light of nature will not relieve us from the diffiulty, since wherever that hath been tried, although assisted by some dark traditions and instructions, it hath miserably failed.

Shep. It is true, that light, in the present imbecillity and blindness of human nature, is insufficient; but God never left us altogether trusting to it, having communicated to us the knowledge of himself and his will through Adam and Noah, the common parents of mankind: but men becoming vain in their own imaginations, as St. Paul says, not only departed from the divine instructions, but, in a great measure, extinguished the light of their own reason, whereby their foolish hearts were darkened. And, besides, 'as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them

over to a reprobate mind:' however, as we are told, he winked at the times of this ignorance; some compassion and indulgence, no doubt he had for those from whom, in after-ages, the idolatry of their forefathers had, in a great measure, cut off the necessary means of knowing him. This is farther intimated to us, by what immediately follows; 'but now God commandeth all men every where to repent;' now, that better means of knowing him are afforded, he expects we should return to the worship of him alone. From both expressions we may conclude, that God requires of mankind as much, but no more, knowledge, than he hath given them means of attaining to. What the heathens suffered in this world by their ignorance of the true God, was hardly a sufficient punishment for their neglecting to make a right advantage of the means still left them in the use of their reason, in the consideration of his works, and in the imperfect theological traditions, handed down to them, in order to recover a right notion of God. But of these matters we shall have a more proper occasion to discourse, when we come to consider the last article of the deistical creed, under which, I suppose, Mr. Dechaine will not forget to press me with the late introduction of Christianity.

Dech. I shall not; and, besides, as the day is pretty far advanced, it is time to quit our chat. Mr. Shepherd, will you step over, and dine with us?

Shep. I will wait on you, sir.

Dech. If you stay all night with us, we will return to our subject as early in the morning as you please.

Shep. You may command me.

DIALOGUE III.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Dech. THE conversation of yesterday hath not been out of my thoughts ever since, excepting when I was fast asleep.

Shep. A man left to his own hypothesis, although it should happen to be a little inconsistent with itself, is apt to think more uniformly, and rest more quietly, in it, than in a

better, after suffering it to be ruffled by the contrary reasonings of others.

Dech. That is the case; for although you and I are still firmly attached to our old opinions, yet, let the inconsistency lie on which side it will, we cannot so easily find out arguments to convince each other, as each of us can to satisfy himself. Is it not very strange, that mere nature should, on all occasions, and in all circumstances, tell us so plainly what is our duty, and enforce the performance of it with the most evident rewards and punishments, and yet that her dictates should not be laws, for want of a known authority? I cannot help thinking, that the being, and power of God over us, are as clearly revealed to us by nature, as the rules of our behaviour. The former lie as open to reason, as the latter. But if the dictates of sentiment and reason are not, in the strict sense of the word, to be admitted for laws, till God is known, and they are believed to be his dictates; yet they are certainly moral rules of action, binding us to the performance of these, and hindering us from the committal of those actions; and therefore they are laws, though of a different definition from the laws of men. As our inquiry turns not on names, but on things, if reason and nature on all occasions prescribe and enforce our duty, that is enough, and we need not take up time in settling the meaning of a word, which every one is at liberty to define, according to his own way of thinking.

Shep I shall readily allow you, and every body else, a right to define your own words, as you, or he, may think fit. Let us, however, have a law, or a rule of action, an instinct, a reason, or what you please, to act by; but let it be sufficiently clear and cogent, to answer the end. I have already said enough, I think, to shew there can be no law, properly speaking, nor moral obligation, without the knowledge of God. I have likewise shewn, from the nature of our ideas themselves, from our manner of coming by them, from the office and extent of reason, and from the theological errors and ignorance of all unenlightened ages and countries, that since the fall, in order rightly and effectually to know God, revelation is absolutely necessary, at least to the bulk of mankind.

Dech. If our duty on all occasions is sufficiently known

and enforced, without instructions, or traditions, or even without a knowledge of God, this may suffice. As to revelation, it can only give us general rules for our moral conduct. It is reason that must interpret those rules, and apply them to particular cases. But reason can dictate, as well as interpret; and is at less trouble, and under less uncertainty, in applying her own, than foreign rules. If we must be taught to reason, which to me is a strange position, to say no worse of it, mankind, by comparing and debating, can teach one another, and improve their reason. Those in whom reason is the least improved, have a simpler and plainer set of duties, than those whose faculties are more refined; and the improvement of reason keeps pace exactly with the calls for it. Place a man in what circumstances you will, and his reason will tell him how he is to act. He knows very well what he would not desire to have done to himself; and that he must be sensible is not to be done to another. Crimes of the deepest dye, such as robbery and murder, are naturally attended with great abhorrence in all men, before committal, and with strong remorse afterward. Lesser crimes are accompanied with proportionable aversion and compunction, as the necessity of abstaining from them is not so great. The rules for positive duties are as plain, and their enforcements as strong, as in the case of negative. The reason of every man tells him what is a good, and what an evil action; and no man does a good action, but he finds a sensible pleasure in doing it; no man commits a bad one, who does not feel the stings of conscience, and a sense of guilt, for so doing; and as good actions, and their rewards, as well as evil ones, and their punishments, ought to bear proportion to each other, so the aforesaid pleasure and compunction are always proportionable to the good or evil of our actions. Moral duties are upon the same footing with self-evident propositions. As the one sort bring their own light, so the other carry their obligation with them, and need not be taught. No man, for instance, need be told, that he ought to save the life of his fellow-creatures when he can do it with safety to his own; or, that he ought not unnecessarily aggrieve or destroy another. The fitnesses of things are, in most cases, self-evident, and the duties resulting from thence too plain to be doubted of by the

meanest understanding. In nicer cases the reasons of duty are not hard to be deduced, and the duty itself is of less importance. Were it necessary to teach us moral rules and obligations, the author of our nature, who never employs two causes or means to effect that, which may be brought about by one, would never have conveyed that moral knowledge to us by sentiment and reason, which he intended to have instructed us in another way.

Shep. Two points you have here endeavoured to establish; first, that the rules of our duty are evident to all men, without instruction; and secondly, that they are sufficiently enforced by nature alone. Supposing the first to be true, although I can easily account for a man's acting, on particular occasions, directly against what other men may take to be his duty, yet I can by no means account for his ever acting wrong, in important cases, upon principle. Much less am I able to satisfy myself, upon your principle, how it should come to pass, that whole nations should have thought themselves obliged to act upon opposite principles, in relation to life, death, property, &c. Timoleon killed his own brother in the life-time of their mother, in order to set the Corinthians free. This he took to be his duty; and the generality of mankind, placed in his circumstances, would have thought that action an horrid crime. Cato killed himself, and, no doubt, thought he had a right to do so; yet the generality of mankind looked on the action as a sin against his own nature and the community, which never stood more in need of his services, than at the critical juncture, when he thought fit to desert it. Mr. Blount, who wrote the Oracles of Reason, shot himself, because his sister-in-law would not marry him. In this he acted on principle, as well as Acosta, who put an end to his life by the same sort of instrument. If the bulk of mankind did not act on other sentiments of duty, we should have but a thin world of it. All true Christians, and I hope I may add the Deists, think the Jews and Pagans were guilty of great cruelty in their persecutions of the ancient Christians. Yet, immoral and barbarous as their conduct seems to us, they thought they were doing good service to the cause of truth, and to the several objects of their worship. Papists think fire and fagot an excellent way of refuting Protestants, and hope to merit

heaven by a zeal hot enough to reduce their adversaries to ashes. This whole nations of them have taken to be their duty; witness the crusades against the Protestants in France, the massacre of Paris, that of Savoy, and that of Ireland in 1641. Now the Protestants, where they have the upper hand, think it their duty to treat the Papists, and all other recusants with lenity and forbearance. One nation of men think themselves obliged by nature to suckle and cherish their children with the greatest tenderness. Another think it unreasonable to bring up sickly infants to be a burden to themselves and the public, and therefore throw them, as soon as they are born, to the wild beasts. The people of one country think it their duty to prolong the lives of their parents with all imaginable affection and indulgence. Those of another put their parents to death, when they are become infirm and decrepit, and feast themselves on their flesh. Numberless instances of opposition about the most important points of moral duty, not only in particular persons, but between public communities, might be added to these; but these, I am sure, are sufficient to satisfy every rational thinker, that nature and reason do not, either by a self-evident light, or by indisputable deductions, tell every man how he ought to act, on all occasions, and in all circumstances. If the fitnesses of things were so apparent, or did our moral duties so evidently result from thence, as you seem to imagine, such glaring differences about matters of the greatest moment to private persons and societies, could never have happened. All mankind are taught from their infancy, and through the whole course of their lives, to look upon certain actions as right and fit, and on others as wicked or vile. Parents, masters, conversation, dealings, human laws, &c. all join to teach them this difference, and frequently instruct them to place the right of actions, and moral duty, on opposite sides. If this continual instruction, and the moral habits commencing from thence, and perpetually fed by it, were wholly removed, I cannot tell what would become of the moral sense; but I am afraid it would dwindle away almost to nothing; although I will readily grant, that an unbiassed head, and an uncorrupted heart, will of themselves distinguish between right and wrong, in very important cases. And you, I hope, will as freely con-

fess, that were this distinction as clear, as strong, and permanent, as that which the eye makes between colours, which, to answer the whole purpose of morality, it ought to be, it could never yield to so gross a transposition of right and wrong, as in the instances just now mentioned. As we generally see men knowing or ignorant of moral, as well as other sorts of knowledge, allowing for the difference of capacity and application, in proportion to their opportunities, and the pains that have been taken in training them up; so we generally see them, making due allowances for difference of constitution and complexion, affected with greater or less degrees of love for virtue, and aversion to vice; nay, we often find them even fond of vice, and averse to virtue, avoiding the one with the utmost distaste, and pursuing the other with the greatest delight; and not only that, but reflecting on it, when over, not with remorse, but pleasure, according to the lessons that have been given them, examples set them, the company they have kept, and the course of life they have run through.

Dech. Do you mean by this, that actions are not, in themselves, good or evil; and that there is no natural morality; but that the whole depends upon opinion and instruction, which in different places may establish opposite rules of duty?

Shep. I mean that moral duty arises entirely from the known will of God; that it is always conformable to the known nature and fitness of things, excepting when God, on account of some superior fitness, unknown to us, orders it otherwise; in which case the fitness of the duty is to subsist only between the action and the express will of God; that this exercise of the Divine prerogative, in dispensing with inferior fitnesses, is to be esteemed by us as a moral miracle; and that neither the sentiments nor reason of man, assisted by all the mere natural knowledge he can have of the fitnesses of things, are able to give him a thorough view of his duty, which ought to be so clear by your hypothesis, as not only to teach him, in all cases and circumstances, what is right, but, also, perpetually to prevent his imbibing bad principles of morality, his confounding right and wrong, or taking the one for the other. I am as fully persuaded as you can be, that there is a law of nature; but the whole differ-

ence between my notion of that law, and the self-sufficient scheme you advance, consists in this, that I call it the law of nature, on account of its conformity to nature; whereas you maintain, that its authority, its precepts, and its rewards and punishments, are clearly and perfectly made known by nature to the reason of every man, which you must excuse me if I utterly deny.

Cunn. If some of the ancients were very ignorant as to many parts of the natural law, others were as knowing; and I cannot see why we should take our notions of nature, and its lights, from persons who seem to have degenerated into brutes, rather than from those who, by following reason, thought and acted up to the dignity of human nature. The other Athenians had the same opportunities of coming at religious and moral truths, as Socrates and Plato; but not having the same candor nor attention, they did not arrive at the same attainments of useful knowledge. If men consulted with reason and nature, and not with superstition and prejudice, about moral duties, they could scarcely go astray. I see all men knowing or ignorant, virtuous or vicious, in proportion as they follow the former or the latter.

Shep. Thus the Deists argue, and thus you take it for granted, that Socrates and Plato, notwithstanding their outward conformity with the religion of their country, were sound divines; that they drew their right ideas of religion from their own internal light alone; and that all other pagans might have done the same, had they not stifled the light of nature, and degenerated into a kind of brutes. If the first is true, these two philosophers were a brace of errant knaves; if the second, it must have been owing to their superior capacities, as well as to their greater candor and attention; if the third, all other pagans, not excepting the philosophers and heroes of antiquity, must fall back into the rank of asses or swine. It is certain, sir, that one man, by the strength of superior talents, can strike more knowledge out of the same hints, or first principles, than another; and that prejudices, and corrupt affections, whether natural or adventitious, are great obstacles to the pursuit of knowledge; but the want of first principles to build on, is still a greater. Socrates, who never travelled out of Greece, nor,

indeed, far from Athens, had nothing to erect a scheme of religion or morality on but the scattered fragments of truth, handed down from time immemorial among his countrymen, or imported by Pythagoras, Thales, and others, who had been in Egypt and the east. These he picked out from an huge heap of absurdities and errors, under which they were buried; and, by the help of a most prodigious capacity, laying them together, comparing them with the nature of things, and drawing consequences from them, found reason to question the soundness of the Grecian theology and morality. But this is all the length he seems to have gone. He reasoned extremely well against the prevailing errors of his time; but was able to form no system of religion or morality. This was a work above the strength of his nature, and the lights he enjoyed; and his philosophy, like his genius, served to shew him what he ought to shun and reject, but not what he ought to embrace. He seems to have been an instrument, in the hand of Providence, to beat down, or, at least, shake the errors of paganism, that the master-builders, who were to come afterward, might find the readier ground to erect the true religion and morality on. And this work he might have done to more purpose, had he not taught his disciples to worship the Gods, and ground the distinction between right and wrong on the laws of their country; in the latter of which he followed the saying of his master Archelaus, who taught, that what is just or dishonest, is defined by law, not by nature. The notions of Plato, concerning the Divine nature, were infinitely more sublime, and nearer the truth, than those of his master Socrates. He did not content himself merely with removing errors; he ventured on a system, and maintained that virtue is a science, and that God is the object and source of duty; that there is but one God, the fountain of all being, and superior to all essence; that he hath a Son, called the Word; that there is a judgment to come, by which the just, who hath suffered in this life, shall be recompensed in the other, and the wicked punished eternally; that God is omnipresent, and, consequently, that the wicked, if he were to dive into the deepest caverns of the earth, or should get wings, and fly into the heavens, would not be able to escape from him; that man is formed in the image of God; and that, in order to

establish laws and government, relations, made by true traditions, and ancient oracles, are to be consulted. These points, so much insisted on by Plato, are far from being the growth of Greece, or his own invention, but derived from eastern traditions, which we know he travelled for, at least as far as Egypt. He was wiser than his teacher, who was a much greater man, because his lights were better; but as they were not sufficient, he ran into great errors, speaking plainly, as if he believed in a plurality of gods, making goods, women, and children, common, &c. But pray, Mr. Cunningham, how comes it to pass, that mount Taurus, in Asia, and mount Atlas, and the deserts of Borka in Africa, make so great a difference between the knowledge and politeness of the nations dwelling on the one side of them, and those of the nations dwelling on the other? Is knowledge progressive? And may it be stopped by a mountain, a sea, or a desert? The natural faculties of men in all nations are alike; and did nature itself furnish all men with the means and materials of knowledge, philosophy need never turn traveller, either in order to her own improvement, or to the communication of her lights to the world. How came it to pass, think you, that Scythia did not produce so many, and so great, philosophers as Greece?

Cunn. I really do not know. We have heard of Anacharsis, who came but little short of Socrates himself; and perhaps that country produced many more, who, for want of letters and records, are unknown to us.

Shep. I think it very evident whence the difference between Scythia and Greece, in point of learning and instruction, arose: the latter had the benefit of commerce with the Phœnicians, from whence they came by the knowledge of letters, and, probably, of navigation, and with the Egyptians, from whom they learned the greater part of their theology, policy, arts, and sciences. Such advantages the Scythians wanted, and therefore, although their natural talents were as good as those of the Grecians, they were not able to make any improvements in philosophy. If Scythia had produced any considerable number of wise men, Anacharsis needed not to have travelled into Greece to improve himself in knowledge, nor had he been shot to death by his own brother for attempting to introduce the Athenian

laws among his countrymen. If Scythia had abounded with such sages, 'Anacharsis inter Scythas' had never become a proverb. If I should ask you why the Asiatic Scythians are at this day as ignorant as ever, while the European Scythians are little inferior to the other nations of Europe in arts and politeness, you would not, surely, say you did not know. As letters and records are the inseparable companions of arts, sciences, and knowledge of all other sorts; so, had ancient Scythia been as knowing as ancient Greece, its distinguished geniuses must have improved the arts necessary to the recording what they knew, as well as the sciences themselves; and consequently, could not have wanted opportunities of leaving some monuments of their knowledge, by which posterity might, at least, have guessed at it. How comes it to pass, Mr. Cunningham, that we, at this day, take upon us to approve the philosophy of Socrates and Plato, rather than of Epicurus and Aristippus? The Grecians were divided in this matter, some following the notions of the former, and others those of the latter.

Cunn. Reason vouches for the former.

Shep. Why did it not put the matter out of question in their own times, or, at least, immediately after? The infinite contradictions and uncertainties among the ancient philosophers produced the sect of the Sceptics, who, while they kept within tolerable bounds, had more to say for themselves than all the rest. In respect of religion, Socrates and Plato either were, or pretended to be, Sceptics, beating down the absurd opinions of others, but seldom building up any of their own, or, when they did, building on mere conjectures, or arguments suspected by themselves.

Cunn. The points in dispute had not, in those days, been sufficiently canvassed, nor tried by the touchstone of nature: this was a work of time, and time hath, at length, effected it.

Shep. Time, then, it seems, is an instructor, as well as nature and reason; but time hath taught the Tartars, Africans, and Americans, little or nothing of true theology or morality, even yet. Time of itself can teach nothing; it was the Christian religion that opened your eyes and mine, nay, and those of Mr. Dechaine too, and taught us the true

principles by which we are enabled to examine the philosophy of the ancients, and by comparing their several opinions with one another, and with the truths of revelation, to decide in favour of some against the rest. Men are very apt to take that for the spontaneous produce of their own minds, which they were early taught, and long habituated to; and to call that the effect of nature, which was instilled insensibly into them, before they began to consider how notices and informations came in, or to keep any registry in their memories of the times when this or that addition to their fund of knowledge was made. But any man, who considers the matter candidly, will find, that the principles of all he knows, concerning either the authority or nature of morality, were communicated to him by instruction, and that with some expense of time and pains, both to him and his teachers.

Dech. As one man is more ingenious at finding out truths of all kinds than another, so nations differ in the same respect, and make various advances, some brisker, and others slower, towards improvement; but still those who lie farthest behind, in their progress to moral knowledge, know also less of the temptations to vice; and the ignorance of vice answers the same end as the knowledge of virtue.

Shep. Moral knowledge does not then bring its own light with it, like self-evident propositions; moral duties are not equally known to all men; nor do the circumstances a man is in always plainly dictate to him what he is to do. It seems there is room for ingenuity to distinguish itself from simplicity, in finding out points of knowledge, which nevertheless, as they are, in your opinion, more necessary than even the informations given us by the senses, so they ought to be, if possible, more universally evident and certain.

Temp. But pray, Mr. Shepherd, is there not a beauty in certain actions, and a deformity in others, independent of our opinion, which may serve very well to distinguish the one sort from the other? And if this beauty and deformity are sufficiently apparent to every man, and on all occasions, will it not serve for a moral standard, and settle the difference between right and wrong upon a rational footing?

Shep. Do you mean any thing more by the beauty of an

action, than the pleasure you find in doing it, and the honour it reflects on you, when done?

Temp. No more.

Shep. Does not the deformity of any action consist in the pain and shame attending the perpetration of it?

Temp. It does.

Shep. Are there not many men who take pleasure and glory in such actions as would put others to great pain and shame to commit?

Temp. There are.

Shep. Whence, think you, does this difference arise?

Temp. I believe, not from nature, but education and passion.

Shep. Our passions, however, are natural to us; and were the sense of moral beauty or deformity strong enough to answer the end, that is, were it as evident and irresistible as our sensations of bodily pleasures or pains, of sweet or sour, rough or smooth, no excess of passion, nor force of education, would be able to bring one man to differ with another about it. It behoves us as much to know the difference between good and evil actions, as between black and white; and yet it is impossible for passion, prepossession, or any other cause of error whatsoever, to hinder a man who can see, from distinguishing between those colours, or to raise any difference between the testimony of two seeing men's eyes about those sensations. Men are taught from their infancy to think certain actions comely, and others dishonourable; they are rewarded and commended for the first, punished and despised for the last; hear all, with whom they deal or converse, seconding the impressions made by their education; find the laws of their country backing those impressions with all the force of temporal emoluments and punishments; and are made to believe, that the Supreme Being, or Beings, will approve and highly reward those actions they have been taught to think beautiful, and pursue with vengeance such as have been called vile and filthy. These causes, perpetually working upon the mind, and coinciding with the natural constitution of things, can hardly fail to introduce an assemblage or firm connexion between the idea of this action and beauty, and the idea of that action and deformity;

which assemblage, falling in with nature, and being strengthened by habit, so that the one idea never occurs without the other, seems to arise entirely out of nature; and it is at length forgot, that either instruction or habit had any share in its production. From hence, and from the pliancy of the mind to different or positive moral impressions, it proceeds, as I observed before, that whole nations have placed duty on opposite sides, in respect to the most glaring and important actions. If this does not shew, that the moral sense is entirely acquired, it proves, at least, that it is too weak to serve for a standard of duty, and requires the check of some superior principle.

Temp. The reality of a moral sense, be its efficacy greater or less, can hardly be questioned.

Shep. What you call a moral sense, is, in itself, only a sense, and cannot, with any propriety, be called moral, until it is considered as a rule by which we are to distinguish between good and evil in order to account for what we do. Man, as we formerly observed, hath, in common with all other animals, a strong desire to preserve himself, to propagate his species, to cherish his offspring, and loves those who partake the same nature with him, merely as such. If these are moral sensations, then brutes and insects are moral agents. Now, Sir, it is much to be questioned whether there is any internal sense distinct from these, as the mere natural beauty of all actions may be traced to a conformity with some one or more of these, and the mere natural deformity, to a neglect thereof. But, granting there is a natural sense of beauty and deformity in actions, independent of these instincts, it is, in itself, nothing more than a mere mechanical or animal motion, like hunger, and can by no means denominate him morally good who obeys, nor him morally evil who acts against it, before it is considered as the will of a being to whom we are to account for our actions. Now this its exaltation into a law it must borrow from somewhat superior to itself.

Dech. And that is reason, by which the relation and fitness of actions to things are found out, and settled.

Shep. The same instances that prove the insufficiency of the moral sense to fix the distinction between right and wrong, shew as evidently, that reason untaught, and undis-

ciplined, hath been found not altogether equal to the task. The difference between right and wrong among men is fixed by their own nature, and the relation they stand in to God and one another, and cannot be changed upon us, but by the alteration of nature, or by the will of Him whose pleasure is our law. About this there can be no controversy among reasonable men. But that this difference is not of itself apparent to all men, is evident to common sense and experience, inasmuch as private persons and communities, notwithstanding their moral sense and reason, have not been able so to settle the difference, but that they have run into moral principles and practices in matters of the greatest moment, directly opposite to one another. If in points relating to life and death, and such as one would be apt to think most obvious, men have held such gross contradictions, it is no wonder to find them differ so widely in civil cases, and matters of equity; such as that between Grotius and Selden, concerning the liberty of the seas, and a thousand others, needless to mention, which the greatest men have been unable to agree about. How often do we find the best chancery lawyers differing in opinion about one and the same state of a case! When they deliver their sentiments most peremptorily, they are only called opinions. Nay, the decrees given by the best judges in lower courts of equity, are often reversed, upon appeals in higher courts, although the evidence produced in both is the same. Those who stand up most strenuously for the universal clearness of the natural light, in dictating the rules of duty to every man, are not ashamed to publish large treatises in defence of it, which must be highly needless and impertinent, if it is universally clear and evident of itself. Every man must see this evidence, if it is so glaring and universal, as well as they; but they are not content with demonstrating the light of every man's own breast to himself, which, they tell him, is as clear as that of the sun. After assuring him, that nature, on all occasions, evidently points out his duty to him, they inform him what is his duty in numberless cases; and, what is worse, one of them frequently contradicts another, and sometimes himself. They act, in this, exactly as the Quakers do, who maintain, that every man hath the Spirit of God within him, clearly revealing to him

all that is necessary for him to know and practise; and yet take upon them to preach to one another. A Deistical book, and a Quaker's sermon, are, in my opinion, two the most impudent absurdities that were ever imposed on mankind. All that which is called Deism and Quakerism, is taught by books and discourses; and yet the Deist says Nature, and the Quaker the Spirit, sufficiently instructs every man. The Papists say, there is a living and infallible guide in religious matters upon earth; but some say it is the pope, others a general council, others the pope and general council together, and others that it is the catholic church at large. The abettors of the law of nature are divided in the same manner about the internal source, or faculty, from whence they suppose it to spring; some deriving it from a sense of moral beauty and deformity, others from reason, and others again from the former, under the check and direction of the latter. This is most amazing, that every man should have a clear and powerful light within himself; and yet that he should want to be told whether it arises from his head or heart; that there should be any controversy about the point or source, from which it sends its rays, or that a man should not be able clearly to determine, whether it is a simple sensation, and act of the mind, or a deduction of reason, that dictates his duty to him on all occasions. Either there is no such light, or it is far from being so clear and conspicuous as its sticklers would have us think; for surely, if it were, we could easily perceive, or at least they could plainly shew us, from what quarter it springs; and if it is kindled up and fed by nature in the breast of every man, they need not be at the trouble either to kindle it in the minds of others, or to supply it with oil from their own.

Dech. There is certainly no need of either; but it is often necessary to remove the dark lantern, which the prejudices of many have placed about it.

Shep. No man, I believe you will grant, is born with prejudices; and yet every man, till he is instructed by some means or other, is very ignorant of his duty; and if the natural light of two men, or two nations, is not able to hinder them from being strongly prejudiced in favour of the wildest contradictions, in the most important points of morality and

duty, if they cannot rightly instruct themselves, or one another, if they can neither prevent nor extricate themselves from the strongest attachments to opposite moral principles, I cannot see what great difference there is between having, and wanting, this supposed natural light.

Dech. That is, you can see no difference between having and wanting reason, and other faculties of the mind.

Shep. Yes, I can perceive a wide difference between these; but it consists in this, that a mind, void of apprehension, retention, and reason, would be incapable of receiving, retaining, or distinguishing knowledge from ignorance, and right from wrong, were the outward means of knowledge placed never so near it; whereas a mind endowed with those faculties, although by nature it is void of all knowledge, is capable of receiving it, when proposed; and, if sufficient means of instruction are afforded to it, can distinguish in necessary cases between truth and falsehood. This is a wide difference, sir; and it is almost all I am able to discern in the matter before us. There is in this respect a strict analogy between the human mind, and an opake body; each in itself is dark, but may be enlightened. Although the moon, or any other planet, is not in itself a luminous body, yet by its porosity it is fitted to admit some rays from the sun, and by its density to reflect others; that is, it is capable of illumination.

Dech. For my part, I believe both men and planets were originally luminous, and have been since incrusted; these by an opake matter, and those by tradition and superstition.

Shep. No, sir, men were originally enlightened by divine instructions, and afterward, through too high a conceit of their own abilities, fell into religious and moral darkness, their pride and corrupt affections interposing between them and the source of light, and so eclipsing their understandings, as to leave them but a faint glimmering of knowledge. Horace, who knew human nature very well, but did not know how mankind were created and instructed by their Maker, and fell in after-times into ignorance and barbarism, speaking of men, before all instruction and improvement, calls them, 'mutum et turpe pecus;' which is nearly the same sentiment with that of Zophar, who, after asking Job if he could by

searching find out God, says, 'Vain man is born like the wild ass's colt.' The same poet proceeds to tell us the origin of laws:

Jura inventa metu injusti fateare necesse est.

And a little after says,

Nec natura potest justo secenere iniquum.
Dividit ut bona diversis, fugienda petendis.

Here, although he mistakes the true origin and authority of laws, yet he ventures to tell us from whence the distinction between right and wrong is not derived; that nature is unable to discern between them, as she does between pleasure and pain, and between such things as are naturally useful and agreeable, and the contrary. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, speaks in much the same manner: 'I had not known sin,' says he, 'but by the law.' Cicero, in the fifth of his Tusculan questions, ascribes the original of societies and laws to instruction and acquired wisdom, which he calls philosophy, and addresses himself to it in these words: 'Tu urbes peperisti; tu dissipatos homines in societatem vitæ convocasti; tu eos inter se primo domiciliis, deinde conjugiis, tum literarum et vocum communione junxisti; tu inventrix legum; tu magistra morum.' In the third book of the same work, he ascribes the necessity of learning and instruction expressly to our not being able to discern nature itself. 'Si tales nos natura genuisset, ut eam ipsam intueri et perspicere, eaque optima duce cursum vitæ conficere possemus, haud esset sane quod quisquam rationem et doctrinam requireret.' Plato, in his first Alcibiades, takes a great deal of pains to shew the difficulty of distinguishing right from wrong; after endeavouring to prove, that 'a man knows not this difference of himself,' he then demonstrates, that 'the people are unable to teach it; and even that their leaders are ignorant of it; from whence proceed wars and battles among nations.' But, high as I carry my respect for these great men, I will freely own, that in my opinion they express themselves on this, and some other occasions, more like poets and orators, or rather dogmatists, than men who had studied human nature thoroughly, and were careful to express themselves precisely; for nature and necessity could hardly fail, in length of time, and at a great expense of mischief and

confusion, to distinguish good and expedient actions from the contrary, at least in glaring instances. This distinction, however, being faint and dim, and when made, being either not at all, or but weakly, supported by religious sanctions, must very imperfectly answer the great ends of a divine law.

Temp. Enough I think hath been said on this topic. All parents teach their children moral precepts of some sort or other; which they need not do, if nature did it to their own hand. But, no doubt, they find by experience, that although the world teach them the difference between right and wrong, yet, unless they were early accustomed to hate the one, and love the other, they would make but very indifferent members either of families, or larger communities.

Dech. And does it not often happen, that they teach them right for wrong, and wrong for right?

Temp. Yes, certainly; but it does not follow, that because some parents have taught their children amiss, therefore others ought not to teach theirs what is good, since children of themselves know nothing. I cannot help saying, that I never in my life heard a more wild and extravagant position advanced, than that parents ought not to instruct their children in the rules of their duty, and the difference between moral good and evil. I every day see numbers of grown people, who, after a great deal of pains taken with them since they came to be men and women, have not yet learned this useful lesson, against which their hearts, if not their understandings, seem to be shut up by rooted prejudices and bad habits; which perhaps they had never contracted, if the seeds of virtue had been early enough sown in their minds, and the principles of morality had taken the first possession of their reason and affections. People may talk as highly of what nature and reason are able to do, as they please; but if I should see a man so far carried away by a speculative dependence on the mere assistance of nature, as to neglect the moral education of his children, I should make no scruple to pronounce him stark-mad; and I am confident every mortal, except the inhabitants of Moorfields, would be of the same opinion with me.

Shep. In the close of what Mr. Dechaine said to us, about

the natural and universal clearness of moral precepts, he observed, that God never employs two causes to bring about that which may be effected by one; and that therefore, as nature teaches us our duty in all cases, it cannot be supposed, that God should allow us any auxiliary instructor. As this argument was founded on his opinion, that he had clearly proved the natural light to be a sufficient instructor in respect to the difference between right and wrong, and as we have since seen reason enough to think otherwise, there is no occasion for a particular answer to it.

There is, however, another point, in regard to the law of nature, of equal importance with the two already considered; and that is, concerning the rewards and punishments annexed to it. Mr. Dechaine hath frequently made mention of the pleasure attending a good, and the compunction arising from a bad action, as proceeding entirely from nature, as placing on all occasions a manifest distinction between moral good and evil, and as giving sufficient weight and cogency to the supposed dictates of nature, which they always accompany. These he sets forth as the rewards and punishments of the natural law. But he is yet to shew us, that these pleasures and pains proceed entirely from nature; that the first always follows such actions as are good in themselves, and the last such only as are evil; and that they are sufficient, without any additional sanctions, to enforce the law to which they are annexed; or, if they are not, that nature gives us full and clear assurances of other rewards and punishments, more efficacious.

Dech. As to the first point, which you oblige me to prove, I own I am utterly unable to bring any arguments in support of it. It is to me, and I thought it had been so to every body, self-evident, that the pleasure we take in doing good, and the pain or remorse we feel upon doing evil, proceed entirely from the natural frame of our own minds, previous to, and independent of, all instruction or habit.

Shep. As this point is self-evident to you, it will indeed be impossible for you to offer any arguments in defence of it. But, as it appears doubtful to me, I can produce some reasons against it, over and above those already offered, which, if they are brought against what you take to be self-

evident, you will surely be able easily to refute. Pray are those pleasures and pains, attending good and evil actions, equally strong in all men? Or are they stronger in some, and weaker in others?

Dech. They are stronger in some than in others.

Shep. In what sort of men are they strongest?

Dech. In good men.

Shep. How comes it to pass, that one man is better than another?

Dech. It is partly from nature, and partly from habit; but by no means from instruction.

Shep. Don't you call him the best man, whose life is most conformable to the law of nature?

Dech. I do.

Shep. He then, who hath the strongest sense of the rewards and punishments annexed to that law, is, I suppose, the most apt to conform himself to it.

Dech. So I think.

Shep. It follows then, that men are made good or evil, in some measure by nature, and in some measure by habit.

Dech. How does that follow?

Shep. You say it is the greater pleasure in doing good, and the greater remorse in doing evil, that make one man better than another; and that it is partly owing to nature, and partly to habit, that men differ in goodness. As therefore some men are very regardless of the law, for want of a due sense of its sanctions, and as that want is confessedly owing to nature as well as habit, it follows, that nature and habit concur to make men evil as well as good.

Dech. Suppose I should grant you this, what will you infer?

Shep. Only that some men are in part rendered wicked by the nature which you say God hath given them. If you maintain the premises, you must allow the consequence.

Dech. I shall never allow it. I revoke what I granted, and do insist, that, as to the motives of duty, all men are by nature put on a level.

Shep. You must then grant, that the wickedness of bad men is entirely owing to habit.

Dech. And what then?

Shep. If the wickedness of bad men is entirely owing

to habit, the virtue of good men must be owing to the same cause.

Dech. That is no consequence.

Shep. Do you not say, that nature puts all men on an equality as to the motives of duty, which render men good or evil according to the sense they entertain of them?

Dech. I do.

Shep. The difference then between the good and bad man arises not from nature, but habit; and, consequently, the virtue of the former is owing entirely to a habitual and acquired pleasure in doing good, and remorse in doing evil, as well as the wickedness of the latter to the want of such a habit.

Dech. But the wicked man, sir, hath by wicked habits suppressed the sanctions of the natural law; whereas the good man hath preserved those ties in their full strength; and to this is owing the whole difference between them.

Shep. What could have induced the good man to follow the dictates of nature, and the wicked man to stifle them within him, since they set out at first on equal motives to virtue?

Dech. The latter, perhaps, had the misfortune to meet with bad education, bad examples, bad company; and these might have suppressed his natural love of virtue and abhorrence of vice.

Shep. And might not the love of virtue, and aversion to vice, in the former, have been as much owing to a happy opportunity of being well educated, seeing good examples, and conversing with good men? Habit is that propensity, or facility, which proceeds from long use, or frequent repetition; and by its nature is disposed to the service of virtue, as well as vice. But it operates with greatest force, when it builds on a foundation already laid, either by principles heartily embraced, or inclinations strongly turned beforehand to the same point. If all men had by nature strong inclinations to virtue, and aversions to vice, these would at least introduce them into a course of virtue; and that course would, in a little time, add the force of habit to that of nature, and confirm them virtuous; so that few or none would be vicious. But as the greater part of mankind are wicked, though some pains, more or less, are taken to make every

one good, it seems rather probable, that men by nature love vice, and hate virtue.

Dech. That doctrine, no doubt, does great honour to their Maker.

Shep. But since it is a doctrine taught us by universal and undeniable experience, we cannot help subscribing to it, and concluding that human nature is not as God made it. He that says it is, dishonours God; and he that represents it as well-disposed, as pure and perfect, as strongly loving virtue, and abhorring vice, does little honour to his own sense or sincerity. All who have any share in the education of children and young people, think in a different manner. They find an infinite deal of trouble in reducing within tolerable bounds their violent passions, their vicious appetites, their wild desires, their froward and stubborn natures, which began to shew themselves even in their first or second year. Advice, commands, authority, promises, threatenings, rewards, corrections, and a thousand stratagems, are applied with great judgment, vigilance, and assiduity, in the nurture of most children, and yet prove successful in a reasonable degree, only with a few. Is it not very strange, that all the world should take so much pains to teach that which all the world knows, whether it is taught or not?

Dech. But this knowledge does not lie on the surface of every mind. It is a rich ore, and worth the digging for.

Shep. If the labour of digging for it, and, after all, the uncertainty of finding it, should be very great, nay, and if there should be any danger of meeting with poisonous vapours in the way to it, the least encouragement would rather incline me to hope for it from above.

Dech. What, a shower of gold!

Shep. Yes, of metaphorical gold. But, as it is not all gold that glitters in the mental mine, we often see those, who search therein for hidden treasures, mistaking brass for nobler metal.

Dech. Phoo; one cannot throw out a metaphor, but you whip it away, and run such allegorical changes on it! You would have had a rare talent, had you lived in the primitive times, at the mystical interpretation,

Shep. I only complimented you with an improvement on your own allusion. The irregular and untoward disposi-

tions of children are but the natural prognostics of those vices, into which, if good education and discipline do not prevent it, they never fail to ripen with age. That mankind are generally dishonest and wicked, may be proved a hundred different ways. The older any man is, and the more knowledge of mankind his experience and dealings have given him, he is the more diffident and distrustful of those he hath any thing to do with; that is, the more he knows the world, the worse opinion he entertains of it. The excessive care taken in all writings and proceedings at law, to tie up the hands of parties, and prevent unfair advantages from being taken, shew how suspicious men are of one another; and nobody but a fool will say their suspicions are ill-grounded, or their precaution needless. Horace, Juvenal, Persius, Boileau, Pope, Young, &c. were keen and severe satirists; but, in my opinion, you, or any meaner lawyer, scourge the vices and villany of the world with a much sharper lash in your writings. A deed of sale, a marriage-settlement, or a bill and answer, expose the dishonesty of the world with such truth and seriousness, as infinitely exceed the most pointed wit. The vast length of such writings, the preciseness of every clause, the long strings of synonymous words, &c. are, it seems, all little enough to defend justice against the many and artful attacks to be expected. There is, in short, a universal corruption and depravity among mankind, arise it from whence it will. Now the things of the world must be ill contrived and fitted to us, if they are to blame for this. They continue as they were made, useful, or, at least, harmless. Money, for instance, hurts nobody, is by no means the cause of fraud, rapine, or murder, although the love of it be rightly called the root of all evil. It is, therefore, from within ourselves, from the extreme depravity of our own natures, that all our wickedness proceeds. And that we bring the seeds and principles of this depravity with us into the world, appears more than probable from the indifferent influence, as to virtue or vice, of the things and circumstances we are placed among, and the early disposition to be pleased with what is mischievous and wicked, and to hate what is reasonable and good, which shews itself in children, as soon as their minds can contrive, their hands act, or their tongues speak; and

which, as I have already observed, it costs those who have the care of their education, an infinite deal of pains to break them of, in any tolerable degree, in order to keep them within reasonable bounds. But, if a strong approbation and pleasure were, by our natural frame, inseparably attached to that which is morally good, and a sufficient abhorrence and pain necessarily connected with that which is immoral, they could never change sides as they often do, and make a good action the object of aversion, and an ill one extremely pleasing.

Dech. Although the virtuous propensities of nature are very strong, yet they may be overcome by violent passions, and bad habits; in which case a different kind of pleasure and pain from those we have been speaking of (which are purely conscientious, and cannot be perverted), being excited in the mind, and preposterously annexed, the latter to good, and the former to bad actions, are mistaken by you for natural and conscientious sensations.

Shep. A mere habit of acting proceeds, as hath been observed, from the frequent repetition of the same action. But in the case of actions, which at first we are at liberty to do, or let alone, there must be somewhat previous to the first action of the kind, that induces us to do, and repeat it. Every habit of acting hath for its source some outward compulsion, or some inward inclination or aversion. Such actions as are purely moral, are also free, and compelled by no outward embargo. A habit of doing ill must therefore arise within, from some previous disposition to evil. You may call this disposition a passion, if you please; but if our passions are natural to us, then the evil disposition is natural; and it matters not in the least, whether you seat the natural love of evil in this, or any other, part of our nature. Much the same may be said of our aversion to good actions. It cannot become habitual, without a long abstinence from such actions, and a frequent repetition of the contrary. But what was it induced us to abstain so long from doing good, that it became a habitual object of our aversion? Could it be any thing else than a previous aversion to it, that withheld us from it? And could an aversion, previous to all action and habit, proceed from any thing but nature? You say, however, that this distaste to good actions, and love of

bad ones, is not at all of the same kind with those conscientious pleasures and pains which you assign to the law of nature, as its sanctions. Be it so; yet as they are found to spring from nature, in its present state of degeneracy, they have as good a right to plead her authority, so far as it will go (which, upon your hypothesis of following nature, is to the utmost lengths), as any other natural dispositions of the mind. However, sir, we have given instances enough of whole nations, that have placed the sanctions as well as dictates of conscience on opposite sides. Men are often reproached by their own consciences for doing that, which in itself is good, and comforted from the same quarter for doing evil. There is such a thing as an erroneous conscience; and our Libertines and Deists have rendered its dictates obligatory and sacred by the doctrine of sincerity, which, contrary to all the notions about the eternity and indispensability of the natural law, hath fairly confounded or nullified all its precepts, and made the opposite natures of right and wrong interchangeable. If a man, say they, sincerely believes in an opinion, and does an action, sincerely looking upon it to be right, although that opinion should be erroneous, and that action immoral, yet he is neither to be condemned of heterodoxy nor immorality; but hath all the merit of thinking rightly, and doing good. This they lay down as a fundamental, indeed as the only fundamental and necessary maxim, without laying much stress on the indispensable duty of using all the means in his power to find out whether his opinions are true, or his actions right. If then the consciences of men are so liable to be led, by the prevailing opinions of the countries they inhabit, into opposite sentiments about moral duties; if they are so very pliant, and capable of transposing their approbation and remorse, as to annex the one to laudable, and the other to a culpable action; and this not in a few persons, but in whole nations, extremely populous and extended, either nature adds no conscious pleasure to virtuous actions, nor compunction to evil ones, or else she does it so faintly as hardly to answer any end; which is nearly the same, to all intents and purposes, as not doing it at all.

Dech. You argue with me, as if I looked on reason to be perfectly useless to the purposes of morality, and unable to

distinguish right from wrong actions, or to direct the moral sense on which side to administer its rewards, and inflict its punishments. Were the heart left wholly to itself, it might indeed be biassed, and its sense of good and evil transposed or perverted. But reason, judging of the relations between actions and things, and the fitness of both, is placed in a superior station to that of sentiment, in order that, as often as it sees that lower faculty inclinable through passion, prejudice, or temptation, to misplace its rewards and punishments, it may keep the moral sense close to the real fitness of things. Now, unless you will prove, that the very faculty of reason is acquired, you will be forced to own, that nature hath given us an ability to fix her rewards to good actions, and her punishments to bad ones.

Shep. Reason sometimes admits of first principles that are false, and sometimes deduces wrong consequences from right principles. When she is not only supplied with imperfect or erroneous notices, but also undisciplined to a right exercise of her natural strength, which is often the case, it is no wonder if she suffers herself to be carried away by prejudices, and the lower faculties or propensities of the mind to be perverted or misled. Lord Shaftsbury himself is of the same opinion. 'Few men,' says he, 'are thinkers, and of those that are, some are vastly less able to manage their thoughts than others.'[a] Although, in the original frame of human nature, reason was the governing power or faculty in the mind, and ought to be so still; yet, like a weak prince, she is in most men dethroned by her usurping subjects, and that on account of her inability to enforce her dictates, insomuch that, for once she issues any orders of her own, she is a hundred times either coaxed or compelled to lend her name and authority, as poor Henry the Third did, while in the hands of Montfort and the barons, to the grossest extravagancies, and the vilest crimes; and not only that, but to exert all the little ability that is left her, to find out ways and means to execute, and false arguments to palliate, the excesses committed by the under-faculties, the instincts, the sentiments, the passions and appetites, to which she is enslaved. She hath not authority enough to prevail with the man of sense, who alone retains any respect for her, to

[a] Miscell. 5. chap. iii.

abstain from the high-seasoned, but unwholesome, morsel; nor from the third bottle, when he hath already drank one too much: yet, like an Irish proprietor, she is full of her former grandeur, and, in proportion as she is sunk from her real station and prerogative, affects to talk high of her rights and powers, as if they were much greater, and more extensive, than in truth they ever were. She is ever giving proofs of her inability to determine points of the greatest plainness, and yet presuming to examine and pronounce most peremptorily about mysteries, and other matters, which, in her highest power and perfection, she was utterly unable to form any competent judgment of. What is most absurd, now that she is fallen extremely low, both in dignity and ability, she claims kindred with God, and says, it is she that dictates to him all the wisdom of his actions. To this presumption she is prompted by those very imaginations and passions, to which she owes her fall from her real dignity and station; for of herself, weak as she is grown, she could never have been capable of so much folly and vanity.

Dech. I find you are no friend to reason, by your reflections; nor she to you, by your arguments.

Shep. And I find she is not to be humbled, at least in you, to a just sense of her own infirmity, which, as I take it, is the first necessary step to the recovery of her original dominion. Were she able rightly to direct the conscience, and to affix its approbation to actions really good in themselves, and its dislike, even to the worst of crimes, she had never suffered, as I have already but too often observed, whole nations to offer human sacrifices to their gods, to kill and eat their own parents, and the very wisest and politest of them to destroy their own children, and feast their eyes, at their public diversions, with the blood and slaughter of their fellow-creatures. If she is not capable of approving the most horrible enormities, why does she, in this late age of the world, when she hath had time enough, one would think, to open her eyes and come to a right sense of religion and morality, suffer the Americans and Africans to worship the devil, and even Christians, contrary to the express and repeated dictates of their religion, to hate and persecute and burn one another for God's sake?

Dech. Some people, as Tindal hath observed, endeavour

to reason themselves and others out of their reason. It must be owned, you do not deal so unfairly by her. You do not turn her own weapons against her, nor absurdly set her up to persuade people, with her own mouth, not to mind one word she says. You only heap up reflections of your own against her, and wisely endeavour to make us despise reason, in order to bring us over to Christianity.

Shep. There is this difference, sir, between your reason and mine, that yours is self-taught and infallible, whereas mine is forced to seek for her materials from other faculties of the mind, to take some pains in acquiring the art and habit of reasoning rightly, and, when all is done, is but too apt to err. These defects, which my reason is modest enough to confess in herself, she also perceives in all other men, not excepting the very Deists. Your reason claims privileges, and pretends to powers, under the present degeneracy of human nature, which mine could never have presumed to ascribe to herself in a state of the highest perfection she is capable of.

Dech. Yet, deficient as reason is, or may be, we have nothing else to examine the truth or falsehood of whatsoever is proposed to us, or to determine this or any other controversy with, but reason; and if that is so defective as you would represent it, all we are doing at present is but groping in the dark, all the researches of mankind after truth are vain and fruitless, and our Maker hath so constituted our nature, that error is unavoidable.

Shep. I insist, again, the nature of man is not as God made it; the human understanding, as it came from the hands of its Creator, was equal to the station or office assigned it; yet, although it is exceedingly debilitated by its fall, it still retains a considerable degree of vigour: it is dim-sighted, indeed, but not blind; it is like an eye that cannot distinguish objects clearly without the assistance of glasses. Reason could not have come so weak, nor the passions so strong, from the appointment of infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. You say, reason is set over the lower faculties and propensities of the mind, to regulate the operations of the first, and check the motions of the last. Our appetites and passions bid us enjoy, without confining us to a due distinction of objects, or to safe and

moderate bounds. Our reason often prescribes neither distinction nor bounds, and, when she does, for the most part executes her office so weakly, that her prescriptions are afterward found by herself to have been wrong; and, besides, are little regarded. Did God originally put this internal war, between reason and appetite, into our nature? Did he establish opposition and contradiction in the minds of his rational creatures? Or did he give the government to reason, and yet render her too weak to hold the reins?

Dech. If the mind is at present so unhappily constituted; if, instead of an orderly government, there is nothing but anarchy within us; what then is to be done?

Shep. Reason is to cast her eyes upon some ally, powerful enough to support her against her rebellious subjects; she must call in the fear of God to awe them, and the love of God to attach them to somewhat more worthy and attractive than their present destructive ends and objects: and as for herself, she is to learn from him the true remedy for her own defects, and the right method of preserving her own dignity and power.

Temp. This, I think, gives us the true picture of ourselves, and the true use of religion.

Dech. You say, Mr. Shepherd, that reason is to call on God. Do you not, in this, confess that reason knows there is a God?

Shep. Yes, sir; reason knows there is a God; for he hath often told her so: he hath often revealed himself in person to her, and his works are sufficient to convince those, whom his revelations have been only related to, that those revelations are true.

Temp. I think it is very plain, that neither reason nor sentiment can sufficiently fix the pleasures, whether of conscience, sense, appetite, or passion, to that which is morally good, nor their pains and aversions to that which is morally evil, without better lights, and greater strength, than are to be found in the mere nature of man.

Shep. And if that is the case, we need not, by any other argument, prove the insufficiency of such rewards and punishments as are vague and undetermined; encouraging, indiscriminately, either virtue or vice, to support and enforce any law.

However, although we should even grant, that good actions are always attended with complacency of mind, and evil ones with proportionable remorse; it still remains to inquire, whether this complacency and remorse are, for weight and degree, sufficient by themselves to deter mankind, in their present proneness to vice, from bad actions, and to incite them, under their present indifference to virtue, to good and regular lives. Is there nothing more required to enforce the divine law, on the observance of which such an infinite deal depends, upon the minds of a corrupt and degenerate race of creatures? We may safely answer, I think, that they are wholly insufficient.

Dech. If you had left it to me to answer your question, which, perhaps, you ought to have done, I should have answered it in quite another manner. The moral sense rewards our virtues with very agreeable, and punishes our vices with very painful, reflections. These reflections are farther authorized and heightened by the faculty of reason; but if both seem too feeble sanctions, experience cannot fail to make up what is wanting. A regular and virtuous course of life is always attended not only with inward complacency and peace of mind, but also with health and prosperity; whereas the contrary course produces nothing but remorse, sickness, poverty, untimely death, &c.

Shep. No doubt, when either happens, it is a great encouragement to virtue; and that so it generally falls out, I shall by no means go about to deny; but when it happens otherwise, when men suffer for virtue, or are enriched and aggrandized for their vices, then the experience of mere temporal events places your rewards and punishments on wrong sides, so that vice must be embraced, and virtue rejected, in obedience to this best sanction of the natural law. Now this is too frequent a case not to need a great and effectual remedy; and would be infinitely more frequent than it is, did not men generally stand in awe of much greater sanctions, to be affixed hereafter, by an unerring judgment, to their good or evil actions. Pray, sir, do you look upon the punishments, annexed to the natural law, to be proportionable to the violations of that law?

Dech. Yes, surely; for a disproportion herein would argue a want of wisdom, power, or justice, in God; who,

having made his law a part of our nature, hath, with the nicest regard to justice, annexed higher horrors, and deeper remorses, to the committal of greater crimes, than to transgressions of a less heinous nature.

Shep. This rule does by no means hold in respect to the generality of mankind; for the old habitual sinner, and most men are so in regard to one vice or other, feels less remorse after the committal of the most enormous crimes, than the raw unpractised sinner does after transgressions of a much more venial nature; so that the punishment annexed to the natural law is far from bearing a just proportion to the violation of it, the punishment growing still less, as the crime, to which it is applied, grows greater.

Dech. But why do you ascribe this to nature, when you yourself say it is the effect of habit?

Shep. Because nature, left to itself, runs almost unavoidably into habits of wickedness; and, as fast as it does, rids itself of its remorses, which ought still to be growing stronger and keener, as habit tempts it to greater enormities. From hence it appears, that some greater punishment, not diminishable by the decay of the moral sense, nor pointed out by the mere light of nature, ought to be expected, in order to prevent our falling into the grossest crimes, or to make examples of us, if we do.

Dech. Perhaps, judging of other men by yourself, you are induced to believe they require stronger sanctions to preserve them virtuous, than are consistent with moral freedom. Man, considered as a moral agent, ought to be free; and therefore the rewards and punishments, annexed to any law prescribed him, ought not to be so great as to take away his freedom. Again, if he be free, he may do wrong; to deter him from which, the rewards of virtue, and the punishments of vice, ought to be present and certain; because, if they are otherwise, he may happen to be little affected by distant and doubtful considerations. Now the rewards and punishments we assign to the law of nature, exactly tally with this rule: they are moderate, and do not compel; they are immediate, and cannot be doubted of, or disbelieved.

Shep. The rewards and punishments of the Christian law are future, and matter of faith, and therefore do not

compel; they are also of infinite weight, and therefore, when firmly believed in, give force and dignity to the law of God, sufficient to render it respected by men, bad as they are; and, of consequence, bear some proportion to the end or purpose of the law, great and important as it is. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, hath God a kingdom?

Dech. Yes.

Shep. Is it of any considerable extent?

Dech. It is universal.

Shep. What proportion does the happiness of any particular kingdom, or society, here on earth, bear to the happiness of God's universal kingdom?

Dech. Scarcely any; such, only, as one small part bears to a boundless whole.

Shep. Are the legislators of any earthly society in the right to back their laws with human rewards and punishments?

Dech. No doubt, they are.

Shep. Are the laws of England, for instance, reasonable and just in punishing certain heinous crimes, such as murder, with death?

Dech. Very just.

Shep. You surprise me. The happiness of this, or any other nation on earth, in your opinion, bears a most minute proportion to that of God's universal kingdom; and yet you insist, that the natural sanctions are sufficient barriers to the happiness of the universe; but add to them others of infinitely greater force and importance, in order to support the laws of a few men, united together in one little society, merely for temporal conveniency. This, I think, seems very preposterous. If the laws of nature were sufficiently clear, those of society need never, in cases purely moral, tell us our duty; and if they were sufficiently enforced, society would have no occasion to institute other enforcements of much greater cogency, in order to their being observed. Nay, if the law of nature were, in the several respects of clearness, authority, and obligation, perfect and sufficient, society itself would be altogether needless. Men would observe justice, and practise beneficence towards one another, without adventitious obligations. A lover of liberty would not care to enter into

society to become subject to magistrates, to support expensive constitutions, to tie himself up to burdensome forms, and stoop to the will of others, if he found he could live independent, and converse and traffic safely with mankind, in a state of nature. The arguments, drawn from the supposed sufficiency of reason and nature, to invalidate the necessity of revelation, prove with the same force, be it greater or less, that society is unnecessary. If the laws of nature be able to effect their own end, and that end is moral instruction and obligation; then, indeed, there can be no sort of occasion for other laws, neither divine, nor human. However, it will be worth while to consider, whether the evil dispositions and vices of men do not force them into society; and, again, whether civil society, considered in itself, is at all able to remedy the evils they seek to shelter themselves from. As to the laws of nature, as they are called, if they could keep men honest and good in society, there had been no need of associating, because they could have done the same without it, the society adding nothing to moral knowledge or obligation, which are by nature perfectly clear and obligatory without it.

Dech. Make what you will of it, the law of nature is that which obliges us to stand to our compacts, both on entering into society, and afterward.

Shep. But I am sure reason as strongly tells us it is rank folly to enter into social compacts, which may be extremely troublesome, at least if we can do as well without them. Were all men naturally just, humble, and beneficent, they might live very comfortably near each other, converse agreeably, and trade securely, without taking any sureties from one another for good behaviour, without calling in laws and magistrates to guarantee peace and justice on all occasions. We see that those few men who believe one another to be strictly honest, to avoid the unhandsome appearance of suspicion, and the plague and expense of troublesome forms, deal together in this very manner, and, instead of drawing bonds with extreme exactness, and calling in witnesses, often make a secret of what they lend or deposit: and thus would all men deal by all men, were it not too plain, that very few are to be trusted.

Dech. And hath Christianity remedied the evil? Are bonds and witnesses no longer necessary?

Shep. No longer, wherever Christianity hath really taken place; and where it hath only taken place in part, it alone gives all the strength and weight they have to bonds, witnesses, and other social instruments. It is an oath, sir, remember, it is an oath, that makes the evidence, and proves the bond. Your friend Hobbes, in the twenty-sixth chapter of his Leviathan, says, that 'equity, gratitude, and other virtues, commonly called laws, are no laws, but qualities that dispose men to peace, till they are enjoined by a settled commonwealth; and that then they become laws.' And so far he is certainly in the right, that they cannot be laws, till some authority appears, to impose them as such, which if it be divine, they become the laws of God; if human, they become the laws of man, or society. It is from this supposition, that man is, by nature, under insufficient laws and ties, he deduces the necessity of compact and society; but, when he represents mankind as passing from a state of nature into a society of their own contrivance, he forgets that, in his fourth chapter, he had ascribed the origin of language to God, and said expressly, that 'God taught Adam this useful invention.' Here he allows mankind to have sprung from a common parent, which takes away the possibility of a state of nature; and that God instructed and conversed with Adam, which makes it impossible for mankind to have been without laws before they entered into society. For if Adam conversed with God, he must have known him, and that knowledge must have produced obedience and duty to him. Besides, when Adam was once instructed in the use of language, we cannot suppose the conversation between his Maker and him to turn on any thing so necessary as the laws by which he and his posterity were to regulate their behaviour to the Supreme Governor, and one another. Our present Deists have found out laws of nature so excellent and perfect, that I cannot see what should induce them to allow of society at all. I really believe, when they come to consider this matter more carefully, and to reflect a little farther, not only on the absolute sufficiency of their own principles, but, also on what they are so apt to complain of, the heavy burdens laid on them by taxes, the infinite grievances arising

from law-suits and partial sentences, the scandalous jobbing of power, and purloining of public money, the cruelty and oppression exercised by those who are intrusted with the power of the state over such as are obliged to obey, the art and craft of politicians, who do but impose on the simplicity of the people, and that they may run snips with the priests in fleecing and tyrannizing over mankind, establish one mode or other of revealed religion in every country upon the face of the earth; when they once come seriously to consider this, and, at the same time, the perfect security, the delightful liberty, which the laws of nature are able to give them in a state of nature; they must, of course, renounce their compact with society; which they may do with the better grace, since it is impossible for the society to prove any such compact against them. I think I see them hastening apace towards this free and natural way of life. They have already laid down the principles, which prove the easy practicability of the thing, and think and act, pursuant to them, for themselves, as far as the laws of society, by which they are yet hampered, will permit: and this is very far; for the laws of the land reach only to outward actions, and, even in respect of them, can be easily evaded by cunning and money, or kept at a respectful distance by interest and power. If a law should come forth, although from a known authority, and conceived in the plainest terms, forbidding murder under the penalty of all that severity which men are by nature disposed to exercise upon themselves, after doing such an action; and enjoining beneficence by a promise of all those rewards which men, after doing good offices, are enabled by nature to confer upon themselves; it would be looked on as a burlesque upon laws. No, Mr. Dechaine, the man who is persecuted for his virtue during the greater part of his life, and at length dies in its service, is utterly unable to reward himself; and he who prospers and triumphs in vice, who wallows in the gratification of all his senses and passions, at the expense of other people's ease and prosperity, perhaps of their lives, will be very unwilling to punish himself; and although education and religion may have given him a sort of conscience, which on some occasions, is apt to reprove his crimes, yet habit can conquer the effects of the first; and false reasonings, helped out by the ill example of others,

and ridicule, can stifle the latter. Gay company, music, and wine, are excellent opiates against the first attacks of conscience, immediately after the committal of a crime; and remedies of less power will do the business, when time begins once to wear away the sense of guilt; and as every former crime is a sort of precedent for others of the same kind, a man, long accustomed to bad actions, commits them without any sense of guilt or remorse. Thus, sir, sin, instead of punishing itself with due justice and severity, comes at length to screen, nay, even to reward itself.

Temp. I cannot see the necessity of taking up so much time to prove a point so extremely plain, and agreed upon by all mankind, excepting a few speculative people; as appears by all the laws and constitutions politic in the world.

CAN you not shew us, Mr. Dechaine, that nature gives us assurances of rewards and punishments in a future state, more adequate than these you have mentioned, to the ends of a divine law?

Shep. How can he do that, when it is his principle, that God never employs two causes, or means, for one purpose; and that the rewards and punishments already mentioned by him, are sufficient to enforce the law of God?

Dech. The Deists do by no means deny the rewards and punishments of another life.

Shep. They do as much in representing those of the present as sufficient. In all they have published upon this head, they are so full of doubtful and evasive expressions, that it is plain they labour to avoid an explanation, and to conceal something that would give the world an ill opinion of them, were it laid open. They have actually objected to the punishments and rewards of another life, as set forth by the Christian religion; they have trumped up others, and recommended them as adequate and sufficient. This latter is the point they labour with the greatest assiduity: future rewards and punishments are directly contrary to their whole scheme; first, as we can have no assurance of them, but by revelation; secondly, as their efficacy in this life, and their influence upon the actions of men, depend on faith, which they despise; thirdly, as they compel obedience, according

to them, and render virtue mercenary; lastly, and especially, as they utterly destroy that liberty of thinking and acting for themselves, which they so ardently wish and labour for. If they had the rational conviction, and real good of mankind at heart, or were they, in themselves, honest and upright men, they would speak out on this important topic, and not disingenuously endeavour, by slight and artful expressions, capable of double meanings, to bear their unwary readers in hand, and prevent their taking the alarm, till they have stolen into their minds such principles, as, if once admitted and rooted there, must necessarily lead them, at last, to a disbelief of all futurity. In this they act like the apostles of the great deceiver, and not like those of our Saviour, who, in imitation of their blessed Master, delivered, with the greatest plainness and fidelity, what they had received from God, though utterly repugnant to the riveted prejudices, and corrupt affections, of a wicked world; and died for the glorious cause in the most shocking tortures, but with the firmest assurance and hope of rising again, and triumphing in it before the faces of angels and men. There is nothing more true, than that the dreadful judgment threatened to sinful men at the great day of trial, is that very article of our religion, which hath made so many infidels, so many wretched deceivers of themselves and others. Could these unhappy men follow their brutal pleasures, and unlawful schemes in this world, and hope on Christian principles to escape the judgments of God in the next, we should have no books published, nor jests cracked over a bottle by way of arguments, nor florid declamations delivered in coffee-houses, against the Christian religion. Our own religion, were it such as this, would be agreeable enough; and so many among us would not cast a wistful eye towards Mahometism on account of the black-eyed girls, and other sensualities, promised in Paradise to the faithful Musselmans by their artful prophet. Tindal, who, though he wrote like a Deist, lived and died like an Atheist, hath by his scheme given us all our punishments and rewards in this world, and laboured to prove them sufficient. It is true, he hath here and there dropped a saving expression concerning the happiness and misery to come, in order to prevent the offence, which doing otherwise might have given, and by that means

keep his book open to a class of men, who desire extremely to be deceived, yet are so delicate, that if they saw at first he was endeavouring to lead them into Atheism in effect, they would wholly lay him aside. On the other hand, he takes much pains to inculcate such principles, as, if true, would entirely render needless all accounts to be given in another life, of what is done here. He says, expressly, 'That God never punishes for the breach of his laws, but in order to the good even of the guilty.' If this be admitted, we can never suppose the greatest delinquent will be eternally punished; and if no acts of sin can deserve eternal punishment, no acts of virtue, for a much stronger reason, can deserve an eternal reward, especially if what he and you all maintain be true, that virtue sufficiently rewards, and vice sufficiently punishes itself in this life. In the third chapter of 'Christianity as old as the Creation,' he speaks of future happiness and misery in such a manner, that an unwary reader would be apt to think him of the same opinion with Christians in respect to those matters. But, upon considering his meaning attentively, it appears to be of quite another nature. He says, 'God hath made our happiness and misery the necessary and inseparable consequence of our actions; that there are some actions naturally beneficial to us, and others hurtful; that there is no virtue, but what hath some good annexed to it; and no vice, but what necessarily carries with it some evil; that if our rational nature is to be the same in the next life, as it is in this, our actions must produce effects of the same nature, and that in a much higher degree, because in that state the pleasure attending our good actions, being no way impeded by diseases and disasters, as it is here, will be entire; and the grief and misery annexed to our evil actions, being diverted by no sensible things, will be insupportable.' By this scheme, which gives us our rewards and punishments here, for what we do here; and our rewards and punishments hereafter, for what we shall do hereafter; he hath provided a sort of salvo for himself in speaking of a future state, and future rewards and punishments; but he hath so separated this life from the next, that nothing done in this is to be rewarded or punished in that; the morality of the two worlds is kept distinct, and obedience to the divine law provided

for by temporal rewards and punishments only, without leaning in the least on any hopes or fears of what may befall us hereafter. Will you be so good, sir, as to tell us what you think of this new scheme?

Dech. I must own, I think it highly agreeable to reason to suppose, that God should have so constituted the morality of this world, as to make it independent of the next.

Shep. And I on the other hand, think it much more reasonable, that man should have an entire prospect of his whole being and duration, that he may so regulate his actions and habits for the present, as to make them correspond with the great things that lie before him. But since, as we have already seen, the main of our pleasures and enjoyments here does not always lie on the side of virtue, nor the main of our temporal sufferings, on the side of vice; and since, if they did, we have proved them insufficient to make and preserve us virtuous, it is absolutely necessary, that greater rewards and punishments should be provided in another life, and that they should be clearly notified to us in this. It is no disparagement to the certainty and efficacy of such future sanctions, that they are founded on faith, as you hinted a little while ago, since that faith is built on reasons so clear, and assurances so strong, that no man can be so certain of any rewards or punishments enacted by human authority, as he is, or may be, of those annexed to the divine law. It is no disparagement to human laws, that the good arising from the observation, and the evil attending the transgression of them, are always future in respect to our actions; nor should it be any to the laws of God, that their sanctions are set at a little greater distance, since there is so much stronger reason to expect them, than the rewards and punishments of men, which accidents, interest, death, foreign or civil wars, &c. may so easily prevent. Shaftsbury, speaking of affections in his inquiry concerning virtue, pretty plainly maintains, 'That the natural affections produce us a full reward in this life; that as natural affection is perfect or imperfect, so must be the content or happiness arising from it; that perfect natural affection is in the present frame of our minds, and state of things, attended with perfect happiness, and imperfect natural affection with imperfect, but proportionable happiness; and that to have the

natural affections, is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment.' In the same inquiry he asserts, 'That remorse, or conscious punishment,' which he makes proportionable to crimes, or degrees of unnatural affection, 'attends an immoral action, though it were supposed, that the person who did it, believed in no God.' He says farther, 'Thus we have demonstrated, that as on one side to have the natural and good affections is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment; so, on the other side, to want them, is certain misery and ill. Here virtue is its own complete rewarder, and vice its own full punisher, in this life.' Again, he says, after a good deal more to the same effect, 'That the greatest of miseries accompanies that state, which is consequent to the loss of natural affection; and that to have those horrid, monstrous, and unnatural affections, inhumanity, petulancy, barbarity, malignity, envy, moroseness, misanthropy, inhospitality, superstition, and unnatural lust, is to be miserable in the highest degree. He that hath the natural affections, is in this life happy in the highest degree; and he who hath the unnatural, is here most intensely miserable.' If this be really the case, there can be no sort of reason to hope for or fear any other rewards or punishments in a life to come. Now all this he sets forth as the mere result of things, as they are at present naturally constituted, without any reference farther than what is necessary for an artful salvo, to the approbation or displeasure of God, apprehended here or hereafter. In the conclusion of this inquiry he sums up the whole, and asserts the same things over again; and in the two last lines he sums up the substance of this summary, and says, 'Virtue is the good, and vice the ill, of every one;' not the cause of the good, or ill, 'but the very good or ill itself.' If the doctrine laid down in this treatise be true, all our rewards and punishments are confined to this life; and the gospel, that brought life and immortality to light, hath done a vain thing. Having already seen, that this doctrine is false, let it suffice to observe, that not only Tindal and Shaftsbury, but likewise all the other Deists, speak in the very same strain, and lay down this as the grand fundamental doctrine of Deism, by which it appears, that Deism is nothing else in effect, but downright practical Atheism.

It is needless to take notice here, that, as Shaftsbury is the most affected and conceited of all writers, so, in this treatise particularly, he labours to strike out, and establish, a new system of morality, unhappily founded on a notorious falsehood; for good men are often miserable in this world, and bad men triumphant; and on a silly hypothetical distinction between natural and unnatural affections, which hath no foundation in the nature of man, what he calls unnatural affections being only the excess, or depravity, or misapplication, of the natural. But he, who cannot send out an old subject in a new clothing, so as that the very subject itself may appear fresh and spruce, is but a poor polemical tireman, and can neither hope for applause nor proselytes. To set a man's picture and name at the beginning of a book, with nothing new, surprising, or fine in it, excepting the mere picture, and titles, would be highly ridiculous.

Dech. Although the Deists have all imaginable respect for the incomparable performances of those great men, Lord Shaftsbury, and Dr. Tindal, yet they do not think themselves obliged to subscribe to their opinions, unless when they are recommended by reason. It cannot be proved expressly, nor, for aught I could ever see, by fair consequence, from any performances of theirs, that they disbelieved the rewards and punishments of another life; which as the light of nature is sufficiently qualified to discover, we have all the right in the world to make them a part of the law of nature.

Shep. Yes; but then the law of nature won't be worth contending for. If we may be punished in another world for what we do here, who knows whether it will not be eternally? And if that should be the case, it will be every whit as shocking to foresee it by the light of nature, as by that of revelation. The immortality of the soul, which it is necessary we should firmly believe, before we can have any notion of future rewards and punishments, can hardly (St. Evremont, and most other judicious persons, are positive in it) be discovered by the mere light of nature.

Dech. And yet Christians, as well as others, draw strong arguments from the divine and human nature, independent of all revelation, for the immortality of the soul; and all na-

tions have believed in it; which could scarcely have happened, had it not been an opinion extremely consentaneous to reason.

Shep. It is certain, nothing can be more agreeable to reason, once the doctrine is proposed, and thoroughly canvassed. But it is certain on the other hand, that there is no one probable opinion in the world, which mankind, left entirely to themselves, would have been more unlikely to have started. Who, if he were not assured of it by good authority, would ever take it into his head to imagine, that man, who dies, rots, and vanishes for ever, like all other animals, should, notwithstanding, still exist? Or, after his body had been crumbled into the common mass of matter, and undergone unnumbered changes and dissipations, that it should be raised again, and he should revive into a new life of thought and action? It is well if this, when proposed, can be thought possible, not to say probable, and easy to be believed. But to strike out the thought itself, is somewhat, I am afraid, too high and difficult for the capacity of man. Besides, it is worth observing, that when any such opinion as this is broached, the arguments that support it, always precede and point out the way to it. Now the only natural argument of any weight for the immortality of the soul, takes its rise from this observation, that justice is not done to the good, nor executed upon the bad man, in this life; and that as the Governor of the world is just, man must live hereafter to be judged. But as this only argument, that can be drawn from mere reason, in order either to lead us to a discovery of our own immortality, or to support the opinion of it when once started, is founded entirely on the knowledge of God, and his attributes; and as we have already seen, that such knowledge is almost unattainable by the present light of nature; the argument itself, which before the fall could not possibly have been thought of, is since that fall clogged with all the difficulties mere reason labours under, in finding out a right idea of God. Yet this argument, far as you are from being able to find it out of yourself, must be utterly inconclusive, when discovered, to you, and all other Deists.

Dech. How so?

Shep. Because you insist, that virtue fully rewards, and

vice fully punishes, itself in this world. Now if thus it is, the justice of God can be no way concerned to punish or reward hereafter; since every good action is sufficiently rewarded, and every bad one adequately punished, in the doing. As to what you insinuate, that if the immortality of the soul were not evident to reason and nature, it could not have been believed in by all nations, it seems to me of very little weight; because such an opinion, once revealed and received, could scarcely have been forgot, or laid aside. No parent would omit to tell his children a thing of such infinite importance to them; or if he did, they would hear it every day from all persons, whom they might have occasion to converse or deal with. However, if, in order to prove the doctrine of immortality natural, it is necessary to prove it to have been universally held, this sort of proof will come to nothing, if we may believe antiquity; for Herodotus informs us, that of all the Scythian nations there was but one (if I remember, it was that of the Getæ, who were taught by their countryman Zamolxis, the disciple of Pythagoras) that believed the immortality of the soul; on which account, says the historian, they were called by the other nations of Scythia, the immortals, probably by way of derision. The Sadducees among the Jews, and not only the Epicureans, but several other sects of philosophers among the Greeks and Romans, were firmly persuaded, there is no life after this: nay, and Socrates, in the Phædon of Plato, says, 'Most men were of opinion, that the soul, upon its separation from the body, is dissipated, and reduced to nothing.' And Tully in his first Tusc. Ques. says, Pherecydes Syrus, preceptor to Pythagoras, 'was the first person, known to the learned world, who taught the immortality of the soul;' which upon your own principle needed never to have been done, had that doctrine been either self-evident, or easily found out and proved by the mere light of nature. The other arguments brought by Plato and Cicero for the immortality of the soul, beside that already mentioned, are very inconclusive. They themselves thought so. The latter speaks doubtfully of the doctrine itself, and in his treatise of old age makes the elder Cato talk of it, as an opinion he was fond of, rather than as a doctrine he could demonstrate; and comfort himself, after enumerating all the arguments he could think

of for it, with this reflection upon the whole, that if the soul, dies with the body, the petty philosophers, who opposed themselves to the opinion of the soul's immortality, ceasing to be, as well as he, would not laugh at his credulity. The former in his Phædon, makes Socrates speak with some doubt concerning his own arguments, and introduces Simmias saying to Socrates, after having listened to his principal reasonings, 'We ought to lay hold of the strongest arguments for this doctrine, that either we ourselves, or others can suggest to us. If both ways prove ineffectual, we must, however, put up with the best proofs we can get, till some promise, or revelation, shall clear up the point to us.'

Dech. Is it not evident to reason, that a simple and uncompounded essence cannot be dissolved?

Shep. Such an essence cannot perish by dissolution of parts, because it hath no parts; but is it therefore impossible, that it should cease to be, in some other way, peculiar to the nature of a spirit?

Dech. You mean, I suppose, in a way analogous to dissolution.

Shep. You may make a jest of analogy, if you please; but it is impossible to conceive the annihilation of spirit, or even of matter itself, by any other means, than by its analogy to dissolution; and yet this does not hinder it from being most certain, that all created spirits and matter, as they had a beginning, so may have an end, if their Maker shall think fit; although it is utterly impossible for us, immediately or properly, to conceive how any thing either begins or ceases to exist. We can only figure those peculiar acts of omnipotency to ourselves by birth and death, or by composition and dissolution.

Dech. Does not the dread of annihilation plainly intimate immortality to us? If we must cease to be, why is this strong aversion and horror so deeply rooted in our nature?

Shep. Don't all men fear death?

Dech. Yes.

Shep. Yet death happens to all men. The fear of any misfortune, instead of proving, that it will never befall us, is founded on some probability, that it will happen.

Dech. But our other fears are given us to keep off for

ever, or as long as possible, the evils we apprehend; whereas this dread of annihilation can neither preserve nor prolong our being; and we cannot conceive why it makes a part of our nature, unless it is because annihilation, to which it is wholly repugnant, does not. Our nature cannot, surely, be so contrived, as to be most shocked at that, of all things, which must happen to us.

Shep. And yet if, as you observe, this dread of annihilation is of no use to us; nay, if it often fills our minds with gloomy and terrible thoughts; why is it made a part of our nature?

Dech. I answer, in order to intimate our immortality to us, that we may provide for our happiness in a state that is never to have end. Try if you can assign a better use, and more agreeable to the point you are endeavouring to make good.

Shep. If the desire of being, and the dread of annihilation, which I take to rise from thence, carried with them any real proof of our immortality, I should be as ready to acquiesce in it, as any man. But I can see no more in this desire and fear, than in many others. When we have been long accustomed to set our hearts on the expectation of some mighty happiness, promised to us, any thing that damps or checks that expectation, fills us with strong apprehensions and fears. Mere being, considered in itself, and simply, is not the object of desire. If happiness is annexed to it, we desire it; if misery, we would be glad to shake it off. But as happiness, without being, is impossible; we desire to prolong, and dread to terminate, even a miserable being; because we please ourselves with an imagination, that it may, possibly, be better with us hereafter. No man, I believe, would eagerly desire being, and dread annihilation, if that being were to be void of all enjoyment, although it were, at the same time, free from all pain; much less, if it were subject to perpetual misery. It appears from hence, that it is not mere simple being we are so fond of, but being happy; nor mere annihilation we abhor, but the impossibility of all enjoyment necessarily annexed to it. The love of being is nothing more than the desire of life; and the dread of annihilation is only the fear of death, in a mind taught and accustomed to hope for endless duration. All our passions of

desire grasp at an eternal fruition of their objects, and, if indulged, run out to insatiability and excess; and all our passions of aversion maintain an everlasting enmity with their objects. Now as immortality is only life continued on for ever, and annihilation only total death; the same passion that bids us desire life, must more strongly prompt us to the love of immortality; and the same passion that excites in us a fear of death, cannot but fill us with still greater horror, at the apprehension of ceasing to be: yet, as our love of life does not prove to us that life will never come to an end; and as the fear of death is no proof that we shall never die; so the mere desire of immortality cannot demonstrably prove it, nor the mere dread of annihilation refute it, to us.

Dech. But can we suppose that God hath given us any desire, for the gratification of which he hath made no provision, even though we should fix that desire on its proper object, restrain it within due bounds, and so act, as not to deprive ourselves of any original reason we may have had to hope for the enjoyment of what he hath thus by nature made desirable? Surely the strong desire of being, or, if you will, of being happy for ever, could not have been so universally impressed on the nature of all men in vain, and for no end.

Shep. I am really of the same opinion; and that, therefore, this argument, for the immortality of the soul, carries with it no small degree of evidence in favour of that doctrine: but it is only to those who believe in God, and have right notions of him; who, as we have already seen, are only those who have been taught to think and believe rightly of God. This argument, therefore, draws all its force from revelation and instruction, and not at all from the mere light of nature; but the light of nature hath prompted Plato with some other arguments for the immortality of the soul, which I suppose you forget, or you would mention them, on this occasion, as doing particular honour to that light.

Temp. What are those?

Shep. He lays it down for a maxim, that 'every cause produces an effect contrary to itself;' and 'that therefore, as life produces death, so death shall produce life.'

Temp. Nothing can be more false, or trifling.

Shep. Cicero, it is probable, was of your opinion; for, if

I forget not, he omits this in summing up Plato's arguments for the immortality of the soul. To prove that the soul will exist after it is separated from the body, he endeavours to prove it existed before it was joined to it.

Temp. That, indeed, would prove the existence of the soul to be independent on the body; but could never demonstrate its eternity. But, pray, how does he prove its pre-existence?

Shep. By endeavouring to shew, that what we call aptness in children to learn, is nothing more than memory; so that what they see or learn in this world, only revives the dim traces of what they knew in a former life.

Temp. Is not that a very weak argument, Mr. Dechaine?

Dech. It is, I own. The light of nature, however, is not answerable for every absurdity of the philosophers.

Shep. True; but the darkness of nature is; for I am sure their absurdities were not revealed to them. The same phisopher says in his Phædrus, 'that alone which moves itself, inasmuch as it is never deserted by itself, never ceases to move; but the mind moves itself, and borrows not its motion from any thing else; and therefore must move, and consequently exist for ever.'

Temp. These are strange arguments, and, in my opinion, incapable of proving any thing, though in the hands of the greatest disputant.

Shep. We have now seen, that the law of nature must be extremely defective, if it do not give us full assurances of very great rewards and punishments in another life, for what we do here; that this is impossible, without clearly proving to us, that our souls are imperishable and immortal; and that the light of nature hath been so far from doing this, that it hath suffered whole nations to remain for several ages in a perfect ignorance of this important truth; nay, and what is worse, hath suffered the greater part of its most unerring oracles, the philosophers, to deny it; and, to the reproach of self-sufficient and overweening nature, hath put little into the mouths of those few, that believed in it, almost gratis, to defend it with, but nonsense and sophistry, although nature had done her utmost, and human literature had lent her assistance, to make them the greatest men in

the world. The wisdom of Socrates and Plato, united, produce such arguments for a most favourite opinion, as they themselves are dissatisfied with, and therefore call for more than human help. Cicero, being so fond of this opinion, that he says, he 'would rather err with Plato in holding it, than think rightly with those who deny it,' poorly echoes the arguments of Plato, adds little to them himself, and, at the conclusion, in a manner giving up the point, with all the arguments brought to support it, he endeavours to comfort himself, and others, against the approach of death, by proving death to be no evil, even supposing the soul to perish with the body. Thus, gentlemen, these sanctions of the universal law, that ought to be most evident to all men, nay, to the most ignorant, are, by the boasted light of nature, evident to no man, not even to the most learned. For how can it be evident to unassisted reason, that the good man shall hereafter be happy, and the bad man miserable, when reason is able, of itself, to produce no tolerable proof, that either of them shall be at all?

Temp. I am surprised, that Plato and Cicero, who were not far from thinking rightly of the Supreme Being, should not have deduced the necessity of a future state, together with its rewards and punishments, from the justice of God, the misery of good men, and the happiness of bad men, in this life.

Shep. Their philosophy was wholly repugnant to this only demonstration for a future life. They held, that the chief good consists in following nature, placed in this life, and made virtue its own reward. These notions, which, in times overrun with errors of the most hideous aspect, served to put a better face on their philosophy, made it as absurd in them, as in our modern Deists, to establish moral obligation on a belief in future rewards and punishments. And yet Plato, in his Phædon, actually does it; that is, notwithstanding his making virtue its own reward, he assigns it another in the future life; but it admits of a better excuse in him, who always founds virtue on religion, and makes them but one and the same thing, than in Cicero, who, in the fifth book of his Tusculan questions, maintains, that 'virtue of itself, in spite of all the miseries to which human nature is liable, is sufficient to make life happy,' and who makes a

jest of the future punishments described by the poets, and believed by the vulgar, without substituting or supposing any others more rational. All this, however, does not hinder him from frequently referring the actions of men to the approbation or displeasure of the gods, and even talking a good deal of the happiness, which virtuous men will enjoy in another life. But neither he, nor even Plato, who fully asserts the eternity of rewards and punishments, in all their distress for arguments to prove the immortality of the soul, ever think of deducing it from the justice of God, and the manifest want of justice in this world. But, granting the immortality of the soul to be rendered by sentiment or reason (I will not stay to ask you which), so plain, not only to philosophers, but to all men, without the least instruction, that nobody can be ignorant of it; yet this will be far from fixing the future sanctions of the natural law, and giving us strong assurances of being hereafter gloriously rewarded, or terribly punished, for what we do here. A man who hath no instructor but himself, and sees no authority or law above him but those of his country, although it were possible for him to foresee, that his soul will exist for ever; yet, if he is disappointed of a reward for what he does here, and can escape from the punishment of his evil actions in this life, he will hardly dread the one, or hope for the other, in a life to come. As he is not sure there is an infinitely wise, just, and powerful God, he will take it for granted that death is an act of oblivion for all that is past; that justice and right, like all the other concerns in this life, are bounded by the grave, and that his soul is to pass from this world to the next just as he does, who, quitting the laws and constitutions of one community, goes over to, and becomes a member of another, in which no cognizance is taken of what he did before his removal. How shall such a man find out that all his good and evil actions will be remembered, that rewards and punishments, proportionable to the ends of a law, on which the happiness of the universe depends, will be conferred or inflicted on him; and that, in order to this, he is to be judged by a Being who is present every where, who knows all things, even the thoughts of men's hearts; whose justice cannot be biassed, and whose power cannot be resisted, although the whole world should conspire against him? Cicero, with all

his knowledge, gives but one lot to the good and evil in another life. It was his opinion, that 'if the soul is immortal, it must be happy; if it perishes with the body, it cannot be miserable.' This consolation he administers alike to all men, without making any distinction; I mean in his Tusc. Disp. and his Cato Major; and, consequently, leaves moral obligation on a mere temporal footing, which, in effect, is not a whit better than downright Atheism. But, in his dream of Scipio, when he does not reason, nor seem to inculcate any particular doctrine, he indeed introduces the elder Scipio telling the younger, by way of dream, that 'those who served their country, and cultivated justice and the other virtues, should go to heaven after death; but that the souls of those who had violated the laws of the gods, and men, should, after leaving their bodies, be tossed about on the earth, and not return to heaven for many ages.' How inconsistent is this with what is said, in the same performance, that 'the soul of man is a God!' Can a Divine Being be wicked, and for wickedness be excluded, for a long time, from the place of happiness? It was this notion of the soul's divinity, that hindered Cicero from supposing it liable to eternal sufferings, and induced him to assign it only a temporary and purgative exclusion from heaven; and that not so much by way of punishment for the transgression of a divine law, as in order to cleanse it from earthly defilements, and refit it for its native habitation above. But if one should ask how the soul's being tossed about on earth, for many ages, should cleanse it from the defilements of sin, neither Cicero, nor any body else, could return a rational answer. Now if a person of Cicero's abilities and learning could, from the light of nature, work out no better scheme than this, which renders futurity almost useless to moral obligation; how much farther from truth and reason must we suppose the bulk of mankind to stray, if each ignorant person is to be left entirely to his own thoughts and discoveries in respect to the future rewards of virtue, and punishments of vice?

Dech. Yet the heathens, if we may judge by what their historians and poets have left us on record, did actually expect rewards and punishments in another life for what they did in this, and such too as were of sufficient weight to enforce the law of nature.

Shep. You cannot shew, however, that they founded these expectations on convincing reasons or assurances, or their wisest philosophers would not so generally have made a jest of them, as they did. The odd situation, and the ridiculous circumstances, assigned by the vulgar and the poets to the future judgment, and the happiness or misery to come, which set their whole scheme in a direct opposition to reason and common sense, they drew from their own imaginations. As to the mere expectation of such a judgment, and its consequences, those they could have borrowed from nothing else but tradition, or their notions of divine justice; but as these latter taught them to believe in many gods, and those as wicked and unjust as the worst of men, the rewards and punishments to be expected from them were better fitted to pervert, than support and enforce the law of righteousness.

Dech. You must grant, however, that Plato's notions of future rewards and punishments were very just. They may serve to shew us what the light of nature, though left to itself, is capable of doing.

Shep. That philosopher, who makes all religious knowledge to depend on revelation, either drew his theory of futurity from his travels into countries bordering on the light of revelation, and the hints of those who were not altogether unacquainted with the Sacred Writings, and the religion of the Israelites; or else he refined it from the crude opinions of his countrymen; extracting and separating, by the force of amazing talents, what was original and true, from that which was novel and superstitious. But upon your scheme, sir, every man ought to have been a Plato. It concerned themselves and others, as much as it did him, that all the rest of the world should have known the sanctions of the divine law as well as he; and, in your opinion, they were able to find them out by their own natural light: but this we see, by experience, they could not do; and, after all, he, who alone was capable of speaking rationally on the subject of future rewards and punishments, was not able to satisfy himself about the immortality of the soul, on which, of necessity, they must be founded. Yet, had he been ever so able to convince himself, and convert all the world to his sentiments; he came, however,

too late upon the stage to be, in your opinion, a universal instructor.

Dech. Pray, sir, is conscience natural or artificial? Does it make a part, or is it a faculty of the soul, as well as judgment or imagination? If it is, which I believe nobody will deny, its dictates must be natural; and as in all men it annexes hope to good actions, and fear to evil ones, it seems itself to bind over every moral agent to a future judgment, and its consequences.

Shep. Deists, I know, talk much of conscience, as a sufficient rule of duty; and, by their doctrine of sincerity, make the judgment of God to second that of conscience, even although it should be wrong informed; which is the same as either to make all actions indifferent in themselves, or, at least, to place their good or evil nature, with regard to the agent, merely in his opinion. How they will be able to reconcile this with their sentiments concerning the eternal and unalterable fitnesses of actions and things, I cannot tell; but as to the hopes and fears excited in the mind by conscience, they proceed entirely from the lights, whether natural or revealed, which the mind is furnished with of God, and his justice. Conscience is not itself a faculty of the mind, but only that habitual judgment which a man passes on his moral actions, before he does them, and that remembrance of them after they are done, to which their conformity or nonconformity to his religious principles adds pleasing or boding expectations. The conscience cannot dictate, till it be itself informed; that is, no man can pronounce this action good, and hope to be hereafter rewarded for it; nor condemn that action as evil, and found on the committal of it the fear of future punishment; till he is furnished with some rule to censure his actions by, and have reason to believe he will be judged hereafter by that rule for what he does. Now we have already seen, that revelation alone can supply us with a right rule of action, and set before us a sufficient authority to enforce conformity between our actions and that rule. As there can be no conscience without religion, so the goodness of conscience depends on the goodness and truth of the religion by which it is informed, and that again on revelation. Most men have been trained up in a belief, that God is present

everywhere, knows all our thoughts and actions, and will hereafter judge us for them. This belief, operating continually on the mind, and being strengthened by its own reasonableness, takes deep root, becomes natural, and adds pleasing hopes, or guilty fears, to what we do. If we suppose a man habituated to no such opinion, a man fed, but never taught, we must suppose him utterly void of conscience, and as yet incapable of virtue or vice.

Dech. Do you not confess by this, that the good or evil of his actions, as soon as he acquires a conscience, depends entirely on it? And surely, sir, if conscience depends wholly on instruction, he, whose conscience is wrong informed, is not guilty of the evil he does pursuant to it.

Shep. All actions, strictly speaking, are right or wrong in themselves. But men, being unable of themselves sufficiently to distinguish right from wrong, are liable to be set astray by wrong instructions. He whose ignorance, for want of instruction, and he whose errors, by means of wrong instructions, lead him to bad actions, is excusable in the sight of God, provided his ignorance and errors were invincible; for God will require no more of any man, than he hath been pleased to furnish him with means of attaining to.

Dech. But I say, God hath given reason to every man, by which he is able to inform himself about such things as are necessary, and to correct the wrong instructions that may be given him.

Shep. If his reason is able to teach him all things necessary for him to know, he can never stand in need of instruction, nor a preservative against wrong instructions. But I think I have sufficiently shewn, that reason itself stands extremely in need of instructions and preservatives to prevent its falling into the grossest errors, and leading us to the most enormous crimes; and therefore, till it is well instructed itself, it can be no proper instructor.

Dech. When right and wrong instructions are offered to any man, how is he to determine his choice?

Shep. By his reason.

Dech. Why then the dernier resort is in reason after all, and that is the only instructor.

Shep. By no means. When two masters teach you two

physical problems, contrary to each other, and each of them proposes and explains his demonstration to you, it is your reason, no doubt, that determines you to close with the one or the other; but it is the master, who lays the proposition before you, who gives you the demonstration, and who enables your reason to form the right judgment, or misleads it into a wrong one. It is so in respect to conscience. It passes no judgment upon actions, till the mind is furnished with some rule of action; and if that rule happens to be wrong, and reason, by the assistance of other lights, is not able to correct it, the conscience, in that case, dictates what is wrong. Neither does the conscience always add pleasure or pain to the reflections we make on what we have done, till we are habituated to think this action comely and laudable, and that action base and culpable. Nor does it entertain the mind with hopes, or dash it with fears, till reason is persuaded there is a God, who watches over all we do, and will hereafter call us to an account for it.

You have asserted, sir, almost in the words of Tindal, and the other Deists, that as God is a perfect Being, so his law must, in all respects, be most perfect; and that every man, by the mere light of nature, without the least instruction, is able clearly and easily to apprehend it. But, upon considering the extent and strength of the human faculties, we have found them at present utterly incapable of attaining to any competent notion of a divine law, if left wholly to themselves. They have no innate idea of God, no congenite rule of action, no foresight of rewards and punishments, impressed on them by mere nature. Nor is the reason of a man, left to himself, and utterly uninstructed, able to trace out a right idea of God and his attributes, an infallible distinction between right and wrong, or sanctions of force and validity proportionable to the important ends of a universal law. This argument, so clear and convincing to those who are acquainted with the natural powers and extent of the human mind, is vastly strengthened by an appeal to experience; from which it appears, that mankind, instead of being able, through a long series of ages, by the mere light of nature, to find out a right idea of God and his laws, on the

contrary, after having, without doubt, been well acquainted at first with both, gradually, and at length almost universally, lost sight of both, insomuch that idolatry, as bad as Atheism, and wickedness, worse than brutality, were established for religion and law in all countries. The philosophers, who lived and sought in the most knowing countries, for religious and moral truth, but sought, as the wisest of them confess, in vain, render this argument still more cogent and conclusive. I need not be particular, in order to shew this, by recounting to you their infinite absurdities, and eternal contradictions. Nor need I tell you that Pliny says, man could know nothing without instruction; that Plutarch asserts, he would be the wildest of all the animals, if left wholly to himself; that all the ancient heathen poets, historians, and philosophers, represent the first men as the most fierce and outrageous race of savages in all the woods; that Plato calls philosophy, by which they were civilized, 'the gift,' and Cicero, 'the invention of the gods;' that Iamblichus, observing the ignorance of human nature, 'confesses there is no remedy for all its errors, but some portion of divine instruction or light;' that, as to moral obligation, Plato asserts, 'there are no such things by nature, as just things, inasmuch as men perpetually differ in opinion about them, and are for ever contriving new standards to distinguish right from wrong, and that therefore there can be no law, except God gives it to us;' that Socrates, Aristippus, Diogenes, Pyrrho, refer the distinction between right and wrong to the laws of society; and that all legislators founded the obligation and authority of social laws upon either real or pretended revelations. If you would have farther satisfaction on these heads, and desire to have it proved to you, that all the little advances made among the Greeks, in theology or morality, were derived from Egyptian, Phœnician, and Syrian traditions, either oral or written, and brought into Greece and Italy by Thales, Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Plato, and others, who travelled for their improvement into the aforementioned countries, you may, at your leisure, consult Gale's Court of the Gentiles, where unnumbered testimonies are drawn together from the writings of the ancients, to prove these points and the passages from whence they are taken, fairly and faithfully referred to. Thus, sir,

I think it plainly appears, that the second and subsequent articles of your creed are without foundation, that through mere unassisted nature, in its present state of blindness and corruption, we can neither have a religion, nor a law, sufficient to answer the ends of society, or to render individuals good and happy; and that we may therefore say with Cicero, in his third book De natura Deorum, 'If it is a thing agreed on by all the philosophers, that no man attains to true wisdom, we are all in a most wretched condition, although it is said, that God hath taken the utmost care to provide for our happiness; for as it is the same thing, whether no body is in health, or whether no body hath it in his power to be in health, so to me there is no difference, whether no man is wise, or no man can be wise.'

Temp. Till now I thought there had been a law and religion of nature.

Shep. And so there is; but that law and religion, which are but one and the same thing, are rather to be called the law or religion of nature, on account of their conformity with the real nature of God, of man, and of the relation between God and man, and the circumstances man is placed in, than because they are sufficiently manifested to all men by the mere light of nature, without the least occasion for instruction.

Temp. This, I think, you have made very plain.

Cunn. Mr. Shepherd seems not sufficiently to consider the texts of Scripture that are against him, in relation to his long-laboured hypothesis about the religion and law of nature. St. Paul, in the second chapter of his epistle to the Romans, says, 'The Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, and having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, one another.' Here St. Paul speaks plainly of a law written in the hearts of the gentiles; and maintains, that they act by the dictates of that law. Now experience, which Mr. Shepherd seems to lean to more than Scripture, vouches strongly for this assertion of the apostle; what can be more manifest, than that all men naturally hate robbery, theft, adultery, murder, and the like? which, although they may, on some occasions, be tempted, by the violence

of their passions, to commit, yet that committal is immediately followed by remorse and shame. It is also as evident on the other side, that all men find a natural pleasure and complacency in doing good. This difference between good and evil, so clearly pointed out by nature, and so remarkably distinguished by rewards and punishments, is a law, a law of conscience, as St. Paul maintains, which it can never be, according to Mr. Shepherd's own doctrine, unless it is founded on the knowledge of God, and a sense of religion.

Temp. This seems sufficient to overturn all we have been doing in our last and present conference, if St. Paul is allowed to have spoken by inspiration.

Shep. If he did, revelation was certainly necessary; for to what end should a revelation have been made to men who knew, or could easily have known, the true religion without it? But if he did not, what he says on this subject must pass for no more, than the opinion of any other man as knowing as he. You have told us, Mr. Cunningham, that St. Paul says, there is a law written in the hearts of the gentiles; whereas he only says, 'the work of the law is written there,' τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν, not γραπτοῦ.

Cunn. And what then? Does he not say, they are a law unto themselves?

Shep. Yes; but he says, in the very same sentence, that they have not the law. If we are to catch at the precise meaning of his words, those for me it is plain he meant literally, and those for you are spoken in a metaphor; for no man can, in the proper and immediate sense of the word, be called a law; so that here I must have a great advantage.

Dech. Ay, if you allow the apostle to have contradicted what he says literally, by what he says metaphorically.

Shep. No, sir, without any such allowance. If by the law here spoken of we understand the moral law, enforced by natural religion, the apostle flatly denies that the gentiles have this law, and only says, that they do by natural instinct, the things contained in that law, which being their only rule of action, they are to be judged by it as if it were a law. But whosoever considers the whole chapter must own, the law he here speaks of is the law of Moses, and the gentiles he speaks of are, by all the ancient commentators, and most of the modern, said to be those who knew the true

God, such as Melchisedek and Job, who lived before the law; as the Ninevites, who repented on a right religious principle, although they lived not under the law; as Cornelius, who was a worshipper of the true God. Pray, Mr. Cunningham, have we not agreed, that religion is necessary to moral virtue, and the well-being of society?

Cunn. We have.

Shep. And do you not allow, that the worship of oppressors, adulterers, and devils, would, instead of answering these good ends, be productive of wickedness, and prejudicial to society?

Cunn. I do.

Shep. It follows then, that the apostle speaks not, in this passage, of idolaters, and worshippers of devils, since he says they shall be justified; for he, and all the other inspired writers, condemn idolatry as a damnable sin. Do you think, sir, he will be justified by God, who is not pleasing and acceptable in the sight of God?

Cunn. By no means.

Shep. Therefore, by the doctrine of St. Paul, that gentile, who does not believe in the true God, but adores, and consequently imitates, the worst of beings, cannot be justified by the law of God; for, in the eleventh chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews, he says, 'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' Hence it follows, that, if those gentiles, who worshipped devils, are to be saved, it cannot be by any law, nor by any possibility of their pleasing God; but by an act of infinite compassion, which God for Christ's sake may extend to such of them as were idolaters through invincible ignorance; yet, as to moral honesty, choose to follow the better dictates of natural instinct. 'If there had been a law, that could have given life, righteousness should have been by the law; but the Scripture hath concluded all under sin;' so that even supposing the gentiles to have the law of God, you see they cannot be justified merely by that law, the very best of them having, in numberless instances, transgressed it. Wherefore, when glory, honour, and peace, are promised to those of them who do well, it is plain, such only are to be understood, as turn from the worship of devils to that of the true God, and endeavour to lead a good life, conformable to his will.

Cunn. And pray what use would you make of the concession, in case I should allow, that the apostle here speaks only of believing gentiles?

Shep. The use is easily apprehended; for you concluded from this passage, that the gentiles, having the law of God written in their hearts, are justified by that law, if they act up to it; yet you see, by examining the passage a little more carefully, by considering the context, and by comparing what is here delivered, with what the same apostle says elsewhere, that he meant not in the least to maintain, that the idolatrous gentiles, who knew not God, have his law written in their hearts; and that he only intended to prove against the Jews, who appropriated the law of God and salvation to themselves, that the gentiles although they receive not the written law of God, may, nevertheless, entertain his spiritual law in their hearts; which if a few, who had the benefit of inspiration and instruction, did, how can this prove, that all the rest, who were destitute of those advantages, either did or could?

Cunn. The apostle tells us how; namely, by nature.

Shep. St. Paul speaks not in this place of what nature might have done, but of what was actually done agreeable to nature in a few; for he was sensible the gross of the Gentiles were far from having the work, that is, the practical spirit and power of God's law, actually written in their hearts by the mere light of nature, since they either did not terminate their defective morality in religion; or, if they did, it was in a false and diabolical religion. I will not here insist on what some commentators do, that the Greek word φύσις, for which we put nature, signifies in this place only custom, as it does in some other parts of St. Paul's writings; for instance, in the eleventh chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he asks, whether nature does not teach, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him. Here also our translation puts nature for φύσις, which in this place can signify nothing but custom. It is, however, worth observing, on this occasion, that the Greeks and Romans took that which is now understood to be a law of nature, only for a law of custom; for the former call that ethics, which the latter call morality; now ἦθος, from which the first, and *mos*, from which the last is derived, both signify custom only. As to

what you said a while ago, that experience vouches for the doctrine drawn by your interpretation from this passage, I need only put you in mind that our appeal to experience is over, that the arguments deducible from thence are against you, and that experience concurs in this matter exactly with the language of Scripture throughout, and with what St. Paul inculcates in other places, which admit of no interpretation, but such as is contrary to that, which you and the Deists put on this. Besides, sir, you ought a little better to consider, what sort of experience it is you appeal to. All men, you say, approve of virtue, and abhor vice. But I say, all men are taught to do so by the laws of their own country, by the instructions of their parents, and by the conversation of all their acquaintances, from their very infancy; yet many in spite of all this, and of the real conformity of virtue to the nature of things, abhor virtue, and love vice; so dim is the light of nature, and so feeble is the moral sense.

Cunn. Pray, sir, are not even the idolatrous Gentiles to be judged by God?

Shep. They are.

Cunn. Must they not be judged by some law?

Shep. They must, as St. Paul says, be judged without law, that is, without the law of Moses, or any divine law, in the literal and proper sense of the words. When a law is sufficiently promulgated, if the subjects know it, they are to be judged by it; if they do not, they are to be condemned for their ignorance of it, at least in case they transgress it. So far as the heathens knew the will of God, or might have known it, they are accountable to him.

Cunn. But you seem to think they could not have known it at all.

Shep. You wrong me, sir; I only insisted, that it was extremely difficult for them to have a right idea of God, and his will; not that it was impossible. But, from natural reason and sentiment, the grossest idolators had some notion of the difference between a very good and a very bad action; disliked the one, and approved the other. They had moreover, from tradition, some notion of a superior nature, although very defective and erroneous. How far any one among them might have advanced, upon the strength

of these notices, towards a tolerable system of duty, God only knows; and therefore God only can judge them. From thence I think it reasonable to conclude, that although God hath not comprehended them in the scheme of salvation by covenant, yet those of them may stand in his sight as objects of his mercy, through the extensive merits of Christ, who made the best use they could of the lights they enjoyed.

Dech. As objects of his justice rather, if they must account rigorously for their opportunities.

Shep. I do not think they will be judged with rigour, although mercy is promised only through faith to Christians. But, in cases of this nature, I look upon it to be our duty, on the one hand to know what God hath declared, and in the other to suspend our opinions, where it hath been pleased to terminate his declarations. When God is silent, it becomes us to be so too. You cannot deny it, nor I assign the providential reason for it; but so it is in fact, that the illiterate Christian is, in regard to the knowledge of natural religion and morality, upon an infinitely better footing, than the most knowing pagan.

Cunn. The Divine Nature and attributes, and of consequence our duty on all occasions, are more easily discoverable by the light of nature, than you are aware of. St. Paul says, in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, 'that which may be known of God, is manifest in, or to, them; namely, to all mankind; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.'

Shep. Do you infer from hence, that all mankind could have easily arrived at a right notion of God, merely by contemplating the works of creation?

Cunn. Most certainly.

Shep. What! even those who were born in countries where nothing but idolatry had long prevailed?

Cunn. Even those.

Shep. How came it to pass then, that none of them ever did?

Cunn. I only insist on the words of the apostle. Please to shew they do not make directly against you.

Shep. This doctrine, if true, will damn all the heathen;

for St. Paul, after the words you have repeated, says, 'so that they are without excuse.'

Dech. Never trouble yourself with the consequence. Do you allow the premises?

Shep. Sir, if the premises necessarily lead to this conclusion, the abetters of the self-sufficient scheme will be more concerned than I, to consider whether Mr. Cunningham hath put a right interpretation on the apostle's words, or not; because if they are taken precisely in his sense, Deism must be a dreadful truth. If all the heathen had full and sufficient means of knowing God by the mere light of nature; and, if, notwithstanding, they continued all their lives worshipping stocks, stones, and devils, what will become of them?

Dech. Bless us all! you are in mighty pain about the heathen. If Paul damns them all, what is that to me, who believe them to be on as good a footing for salvation, as himself?

Shep. It does concern you not a little, since you hold the same damnatory doctrine which you have ascribed to St. Paul. If, as you maintain, every heathen had sufficient means of knowing God, and his duty; and every heathen, notwithstanding, through a neglect of those means, was grossly ignorant of both; it follows, that every heathen must be damned for wilfully sinning against, or stifling the clear light of his own nature. But Mr. Cunningham is not only concerned to refute this doctrine he hath adopted, but likewise to vindicate St. Paul against all who shall charge him with holding an opinion, which upon Mr. Cunningham's own principles must be very shocking. Wherefore, I own, the stress of this argument lies rather on him, than you. Pray, Mr. Cunningham, do you think, St. Paul intended by this passage to shew, that revelation, is absolutely useless?

Cunn. I mean no such thing, sir.

Shep. Yet you infer from it, that all men, in the darkest ages and countries, could have easily found out a right idea of God, and human duty, by the unassisted light of nature. This surely makes revelation, in the opinion of St. Paul, not only unnecessary, but impertinent.

Dech. Was there ever so unfair a disputant! You do not seem, sir, to seek for the truth, but only to distress your

antagonist, by drawing consequences from his interpretation, without proposing one of your own.

Shep. If Mr. Cunningham would once acknowledge the insufficiency of his, it would then lie upon me either to own I do not understand the passage, or to furnish a better. Pray, Mr. Cunningham, may I ask you another question?

Cunn. Provided it is a fair one.

Shep. Do you think St. Paul believed in the Mosaic history?

Cunn. An excellent question! Yes.

Shep. Then he must have believed, that Adam was once in a state of innocence, and fell from thence into a state of corruption, by an act of disobedience, which corruption he entailed on his posterity; that, before he fell, God conversed with him, revealed not only his own being, but also his will, in some respects, to him; that God also revealed himself and his will to Noah; and, that both Adam and Noah, by their sacrifices, and other acts of worship, as well as in the way of conversation, must have made known to their posterity such notices of God, and their duty, as they themselves had received by immediate revelation.

Cunn. All this St. Paul must have believed.

Shep. But St. Paul could hardly have believed a tittle of it, had he been persuaded, as you think he was, that all men could have known God, and their duty, without revelation; for, to say nothing of Noah, Adam in the full perfection of his nature must have enjoyed as much at least of the natural light, as any other man, and therefore stood as little in need of preternatural instruction, as either Mr. Dechaine or you. But if St. Paul did actually believe all you have granted, an easy interpretation of the words you have cited from him will result from his faith in the Mosaic history, which will not be liable to the inconveniences of yours. The language of nature might have been more intelligible to man, before his faculties were impaired by sin, than it hath been since. But if he had failed to find the knowledge of his Maker by this language, the voice of God himself, instructing him, must have been sufficient for this purpose. The first men having, by either or both these means, a right idea of God from their common parents, the works of nature became a standing proof or remembrancer of that idea, bearing perpetual wit-

ness of the truth and rectitude thereof, insomuch that whosoever fell therefrom into Atheism, or unworthy notions of the Deity, must have been inexcusable. Yet men, being now grown wicked and vain, could no longer bear the opposition between their own principles and practices, could no longer endure 'to hold the truth in unrighteousness, and therefore did not like to retain God in their knowledge; but changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Thus were their foolish hearts darkened; upon which God gave them over to a reprobate mind, gave them up to uncleanness, to sins of all kinds, even such as were utterly against nature.' This is certainly the true meaning of the whole passage; from whence give me leave to observe, that there are two kinds of criminals pointed out to us therein. The first is of those, who, having an actual knowledge of the true God, did nevertheless pervert and corrupt this knowledge, both in themselves and their posterity. These, no doubt of it, were most horribly guilty and odious in the sight of God, because they sinned against actual knowledge. The other sort is of those, who, descending from the original corrupters, acquiesced in the entail of blindness and idolatry, when they might have recovered, although indeed not without extreme difficulty, the right idea of God, by the force of reason, arguing from the works of creation, and assisted by the imperfect idea of divinity, which could never be totally extinguished. These were infinitely less culpable than the former, inasmuch as they only sinned in the neglect of very feeble lights, and defective means. I have already intimated, that God will judge both these classes of men, according to their respective opportunities.

Cunn. You may bestow as high encomiums as you please on your own sense of St. Paul's words; you are, however, not only unsupported, but opposed therein, by all the divines and commentators.

Shep. We are to be concluded by the drift of St. Paul himself in this passage, rather than by the sentiments of his commentators, who, writing before the present controversy about the sufficiency of the natural light was set on foot, had not occasion to look so sharply into the sense of this, and some other places of Scripture, as hath been done

since. St. Chrysostom, in his descant on the passage, says as much as you, or any Deist, could wish, upon the loudness and clearness of that language, by which the works of nature proclaim the being, power, and wisdom of God: yet, after all, he says, 'the Gentiles fell into a kind of madness; insomuch that, having deprived themselves of the light, and involved their minds in the darkness of their own thoughts, their attempt to travel towards heaven ended in a miserable shipwreck, as his must do, who, in a dark night, undertakes a voyage by sea.' This is a true representation of St. Paul's meaning, in which the Gentiles stand charged with departing from the light and reason bestowed on them by God, and plunging themselves into such a state of ignorance and reprobation, as they were never afterward able to extricate themselves out of. The book of nature was still as legible as ever, but they ceased to understand its language and characters. The way to true religious knowledge lay still open, but they being misguided by conceit, and too great attachment to sensible things, entered upon a wrong way; so that still the longer they travelled, the farther they wandered from the knowledge of the true God, and right religion. The doctrine of St. Paul concerning the blindness into which the Gentiles fell, is so confirmed by the state of religion in Africa, America, and even China, where, to this day, no advances towards the true religion have been made, that we can no longer be at a loss to judge either of his meaning, or of the insufficiency of unassisted reason to dissipate the prejudices of the heathen world, and open their eyes to religious truths.

Temp. I never in my life attended so closely to any debate; and, I must own, I am not without my reward. While I watched every argument on both sides, I kept history and experience still in view, and compared them with the words of the inspired writer, with which they seemed at first to clash; but I now clearly see a perfect harmony between the words of the apostle, on the one hand, and our knowledge of human nature, on the other; insomuch, that I cannot help observing, upon the whole, how much greater appearance of truth there is in the apostle's account of ancient theology, than in that of heathen writers. If our knowledge of God had come by observation or philosophy, it must have arisen,

by degrees, from a discovery of causes by their effects; then the works of creation must have been found out to be effects; afterward, the first cause must have been sought for; and, in the end, the nature of that cause must have been traced by the nature of the effects. Thus must reason, in its inquiry after God, have proceeded; and its last deductions must have been more perfect than its first. If the works of creation can, in our present blind condition, easily discover to us the being and attributes of God, surely they must be still better qualified to support that discovery, after it is made, and to correct any mistakes that might have arisen in the making of it; which is an easier matter by far, than to make the discovery itself. But St. Paul gives us quite another history of the business: he says, that 'from the creation, ἀπὸ κτίσεως, the invisible things of God are clearly seen;' and afterward, through philosophy, and the boasted wisdom of man, almost wholly lost, or changed into idolatry, worse in itself than even total ignorance. This seems plainly to intimate, that our knowledge of God did not take its rise from mere reason, but from revelation, or, at least, from some extraordinary power or faculty in the nature of our first parents, which their posterity are destitute of, and which to suppose, is, in respect to our present debate, the same thing as to suppose a revelation.

Cunn. If you go on, at this rate, to vilify reason, you must soon quit it entirely, and give yourself up to vain traditions, or old wives tales.

Shep. Mr. Dechaine should have said that; and not an incumbent of two parishes, who ought to have remembered how St. Paul speaks of human wisdom in respect to the knowledge of God and religion. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he says, 'God had foretold, that he would destroy and confound the wisdom of the wise;' and he asks, 'Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' Here the apostle expressly asserts, that the world did not, by its own wisdom, philosophizing on the wisdom of God displayed in the works of creation, find out God; and that God was therefore pleased, by the

preaching of the gospel, which to the conceited Greeks appeared foolishness, to supply the vast defects of human wisdom, that faith might effect that which philosophy had failed of. The same apostle, in the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, distinguishes faith from knowledge, and defines it, 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen;' and then adds, 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God.' So that, according to him, the very first and fundamental principle, on which the philosopher can build his investigation of religion, must be communicated to him by faith, not his own researches. And, indeed, nothing but revelation and faith can, with any certainty, teach us, that 'the things which are seen,' namely, matter, and all its various modifications, were made out of things that do not appear, that is, out of nothing, and by a pure spirit. Philosophy could hardly have beat out so inconceivable a mystery, but must have either concluded matter to have been eternal, or must have supposed its efficient cause to have been material. This we see verified by experience: the heathens, as Porphyry himself acknowledges, never ascribed the creation of the world to God; but maintained, that either the universe is God, or that its matter was coeval with God. 'If we look back,' says the learned Shuckford, 'and make a fair inquiry, we shall find, that the ancient wise men did not fall into their errors by paying too great a deference to tradition, and pretended revelations, but by setting up what they thought a reasonable scheme of religion, in opposition to the traditional; and that the frame and course of nature was not sufficiently understood, to make men masters of true philosophy.' The same author farther observes, that 'there is nothing so extravagant or ridiculous, which men of the greatest parts, and eminency for the natural strength of their understandings, have not defended; as is evident, by what Plato and Plutarch have said in vindication of the Egyptian superstitions.' As for the latter, he says, in his book concerning Isis and Osiris, that 'there is nothing in the heathen mythology unreasonable, idle, or superstitious; and that a good moral, historical, or philosophical reason, may be given for every part of every fable therein.'

Temp. I imagined such persons as Plato, Plutarch, Ci-

cero, &c. had, in reality, despised the theology of their respective countries.

Shep. Socrates and Plato saw an infinite deal of absurdity, and even wickedness, in the Pagan worship: yet having no thorough assurances of a better, and seeing plainly the necessity of religion, they laboured to correct that of their own country; but, as for Cicero and Plutarch, they had both of them a warm zeal for the superstitions they were educated in, especially the latter, who, it must be confessed, was one of the wisest and greatest men that ever enriched the commonwealth of letters. If such men as these were capable of thinking so like the vulgar and illiterate, how could the more ignorant, that is, almost the whole race of mankind, have beat out from their own observations a right notion of God, and their duty to him? When I consider either the narrow bounds of human reason in articles of knowledge more attainable, or the full experiment made of its weakness in former ages, and in men of the greatest abilities, and the highest improvements; I cannot but conclude it almost incapable of arriving at a right or sufficient knowledge of God by its own unassisted efforts.

Cunn. Be that as it will, in the tenth chapter of the Acts, Peter says, 'I perceive God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' This, surely, is as much as to say, that in every nation some may know and fear God, and live good lives.

Shep. And although some should, what is that to the bulk of mankind? He that worketh righteousness, must, in order to it, fear God; and he that feareth God, must first know him, namely, the true God, before he can render himself agreeable to him. But no shadow of an argument can be drawn from this reflection of St. Peter, that all mankind may, without instruction, easily know him; nor from the particular case of Cornelius, which gave occasion to that reflection: for this good man, having spent some time among the Jews, was already a convert to the worship of the only true God, and, in consequence of this, was very devout, and gave much to the poor; yet, not satisfied with this, he sent for St. Peter, by the command of an angel, with an earnest desire to become a Christian. Such a person, and in such

a disposition, although no Jew, could not fail to be acceptable in the sight of God: but this is nothing at all to the present purpose, because it was his living among the Jews that made him a worshipper of the true God; and it was the vision of an angel that inclined him to Christianity. Had he been centurion of a band in Spain or Britain at that time, and not favoured with a particular message from God, I am apt to think he could hardly have made such advances towards the truth. There is no one so blind, but may perceive, by the whole passage, that St. Peter himself was converted, on this occasion, from the narrow and rigid partiality of a Jew, who thought the benefits of the Christian religion were to be confined to his own nation, and made to understand the extent of the new dispensation, which is laid open to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, if they will, like Cornelius, shew the necessary dispositions to embrace it. Although nothing can be more obvious than this, yet Tindal hath the assurance to place the reflection before-mentioned at the front of his book; where, being separated from the context, it seems to speak against the necessity of revelation, and to refute the sacred writings, from whence it is borrowed. Had you not taken it upon his authority, and neglected to read over the passage where it lies, you could never have brought it thus, in defence of his opinion, against the religion you profess.

Cunn. I do not think it any way prejudicial to the Christian religion, to shew from Scripture, either that the religion and law of nature are good in themselves, or discoverable by the light of natural reason.

Shep. What do you think, Mr. Dechaine?

Dech. No matter whether it is or not; even Scripture may be quoted, if, on any occasion, it serves the cause of truth. Does not St. Paul acknowledge to the Athenians, that certain of the Greek poets had held the omnipresence of God; and 'that in him we live, and move, and have our being?'

Shep. What then? It does not follow, that all the Greeks, much less all the barbarous nations, either had, or could have, a right notion of God; nor even that those poets thought properly of him in any other respect. If St. Paul had been sensible they did, he would not have failed

to quote them for other points of theology, as well as this, because nothing could have better served his purpose; as we may perceive, not only by this quotation, but by his taking the *exordium* of this very discourse from the inscription on an altar at Athens, 'To the unknown God.' It is easy to perceive, he was glad to catch at the smallest glimmerings of truth preserved among the Greeks, in order to recommend the worship of the only true God, as a thing not altogether new to all their countrymen.

Dech. He says, in his short discourse at Lystra, that 'God left not himself without witnesses among the darkest nations, in that he did good, and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons; filling their hearts with food and gladness.'

Shep. It is true, God gave all men, and the Lystrians among the rest, full evidence of his being and goodness; that is, sufficient evidence, in the works of creation and providence, to prove both, in case a proof should, at any time, become necessary. Observe, however, sir, that the starting a proposition is one thing, and the proof of it quite another. But the Lystrians were as blind to this evidence as other heathens, and attributed the goodness of God to false deities; in consequence of which, taking Barnabas and Paul for Jupiter and Mercury, whom they thanked for the common blessings of life, they were going to offer sacrifices to them for the miraculous cure of the cripple. We see evidently, by their behaviour, there was a necessity for turning their eyes towards the works of creation, and the effects of God's goodness, in order to guide them to the knowledge of the true cause. Every science hath its proofs in the nature of things; yet all sciences require to be taught; and those require it most, the first principles of which lie a little out of the reach of ordinary capacities. The first principles of religion, being of a high and spiritual nature, are harder to be found out, than those of any other science; because the minds of men are gross and earthly, used to objects of sense; and all their depraved appetites, and corrupt dispositions, which are by nature opposite to the true religion, help to increase the natural weakness of their reason, and clip the wings of their contemplations, when they endeavour, by their own strength,

to soar towards God and heavenly things. No man, in his, nor hardly in any other time, knew better how to catch at the evidence of divine truths, discovered in the works of creation, nor had better opportunities, than Plato; yet, with all the helps he derived from foreign and domestic instruction, he finds himself, on every occasion, at a loss, when he speaks of God and divine matters; relies on oracles, traditions, and revelations; and, having got a little taste of this kind of instruction, is every now and then confessing his want of more, and wishing for it with the greatest anxiety.

Temp. Mr. Shepherd, do you not take revelation to be necessary?

Shep. I do.

Temp. I would be glad to hear wherein you make that necessity to consist; for although you represent the blindness of human nature as extremely great, in respect to the investigation of true religion, which, indeed, I think it is; yet you express yourself, on some occasions, as if you thought mankind capable of finding out a right idea of God and their duty. From hence arises no small confusion in my mind, which, otherwise, reflecting on the horrible errors into which all uninstructed nations plunged themselves, in relation to the nature and will of the Deity, and considering the narrowness of the human understanding, immersed in matter, and forming, of itself, no other but sensible ideas, is now inclined to think we could never have found out the true religion, had not some superior Being instructed us therein.

Dech. Well said, Templeton! O the swallow of thy credulity! The lessons of the nursery are uppermost again, and the faith of Templeton the scholar outruns the arguments of Shepherd the master.

Shep. Surely that can never happen, as long as the reasonings of Mr. Dechaine are so convincing, and his wit so very keen. Pray, Mr. Templeton, do you think God is absolutely bound, by his justice, to give us a true religion, and every other good thing we may stand in need of?

Temp. I rather think this, and all other his gifts, proceed from his infinite goodness.

Shep. Is his goodness voluntary, or determined by necessity?

Temp. Without question, it is voluntary; and therefore merits our deepest acknowledgments.

Shep. From the attributes of God, then, it cannot be proved, that every man must necessarily have the true religion given to him; and accordingly, we find, some have not been blessed with sufficient means of attaining to it; which could never have happened, had God been obliged by justice, or any necessity of fate, or his own nature, to bestow those means on all men.

Temp. Yet men cannot be happy without the true religion.

Shep. Right; and it is from hence, and the extreme difficulty, not impossibility, of finding out that religion by the unassisted light of nature, that the necessity of a revelation arises. Besides, although a few persons of superior talents and application should discover the true religion, this could be of little use, because merely by their own efforts, and without the assistance of miracles and grace, they could never so propagate their discovery, as to convert the world thereunto, and universally convince mankind of its truth. If all men, therefore, stand in absolute need of the true religion, in order to arrive at true and perfect happiness; and if few or none can attain to that religion by the mere light of nature, in its present dark and degenerate circumstances, and in the midst of violent appetites, of rooted prejudices, and of sensible objects and ideas only; it will follow, that nothing but revelation can make us perfectly happy. I will farther explain myself, by a parallel instance. If you can earn bread for yourself and family by no other means but surveying of land, or taking the command of a ship; must you not, in order to a thorough skill in either of those employments, understand geometry?

Temp. I must.

Shep. Can you invent a system of geometry, without the assistance of any book, or master?

Temp. I cannot.

Shep. Although you possibly might, it would, at least, require the greater part, if not the whole, of your life, to perfect such a discovery; but, in the mean time, your necessary subsistence would not allow you so much time for speculation; or, if it should, there is a million to one, the

tediousness and trouble, attending such a course of study, would deter you from the attempt.

Temp. I should never once think of setting about it.

Shep. If, therefore, you must be a geometrician, the branch of knowledge you stand so much in need of, must be revealed to you by the books of Euclid, or some living instructor.

Temp. I now plainly perceive wherein you place the necessity of revelation.

Shep. In this subordinate sense, revelation is necessary, in order to a competent knowledge of natural religion; that is, in order to our arriving at a right idea of God, and his attributes, of the relation we stand in to him as the Creator and Governor of the world, and of adequate sanctions to enforce his law. The wisest of the heathen sages judged, in this, exactly as I do; and made our knowledge of God to depend, not on philosophical inquiries, but on tradition. Plato is full of reflections to this purpose; and, not thinking the traditions, which he was acquainted with, sufficient, he talks of a future instructor to be sent from God, to teach the world a more perfect knowledge of religious duties. 'The truth is,' says he, speaking in his first book De Legibus, concerning future rewards and punishments, 'to determine or establish any thing certain about these matters, in the midst of so many doubts and disputations, is the work of God only.' In his Phædon, one of the speakers says to Socrates, concerning the immortality of the soul, 'I am of the same opinion with you, that, in this life, it is either absolutely impossible, or extremely difficult, to arrive at a clear knowledge in this matter.' In the apology he wrote for Socrates, he puts these words into his mouth, on the subject of reformation of manners: 'You may pass the remainder of your days in sleep, or a despair of finding out a sufficient expedient for this purpose, if God, in his providence, doth not send you some other instructor.' And in his Epinomis he says, 'Let no one take upon him to teach, if God do not lead the way.' In the book De Mundo, ascribed to Aristotle, we have a remarkable passage to this effect: 'It is an old tradition, almost universally received, that all things proceeded from God, and subsist through him; and that no nature is self-sufficient, or inde-

pendent of God's protection and assistance.' In his metaphysics he ascribes the belief of the gods, and of this, that the Deity encompasses and comprehends all nature, to a traditionary habit of speaking, handed down from the first men to after ages. Cicero, in his treatise concerning the nature of the gods, introduces Cotta blaming those who endeavoured, by argumentation, to prove there are gods, and affirming that this only served to make the point doubtful, which, by the instructions and traditions of their forefathers, had been sufficiently made known to them, and established. Plutarch, speaking of the worship paid to a certain ideal divinity, which his friend had called in question, says, 'It is enough to believe pursuant to the faith of our ancestors, and the instructions communicated to us in the country where we were born and bred; than which we can neither find out, nor apply, any argument more to be depended on.'[a] So much for the necessity of revelation, in respect to natural religion. There are, however, other articles of religion, as necessary to be known as the natural; which we cannot possibly have the least notion of, without revelation: such as the doctrine of the Trinity, of the incarnation, of the satisfaction, of grace, and of the resurrection. To the knowledge of these, revelation is absolutely necessary. Man, in the utmost perfection of his nature, is utterly incapable of conceiving such mysteries without the assistance of a Divine instructor; nor, after they are revealed, can they be effectually, if at all, propagated, without the aid of miracles.

Dech. We have other matters, parson, to talk about, before we come to your miracles and mysteries.

Temp. But pray, Mr. Shepherd, is the knowledge of these latter articles necessary to salvation?

Shep. No man can be saved, who, having an opportunity of knowing them, neglects it; or who, being once instructed in them, remains, or turns an unbeliever. As to those who never had any such opportunity, we are no way concerned to inquire what God intends to do with them; and, accordingly, God hath given us, in holy Scripture, little or no grounds whereon to build even an opinion, in a matter so unfathomable, and so wholly foreign to all the valuable

[a] Plut. de Amat.

purposes of useful knowledge. I have already observed to you, that, on the principles of Deism, they must be all infinitely guilty, in the sight of God, for wilfully acting in the grossest manner against the clear light, theological, as well as moral, which God, say the Deists, hath bestowed, by nature, abundantly on every man. There is no such heavy sentence passed on them by revelation; for if, on the one hand, the means of entering into the Christian covenant are denied them, and many expressions wholly exclude them from the scriptural terms of salvation, it is certain, that, on the other, there is reason given us, in Scripture, to hope that the merits of Christ's death may, in some measure, be extended to them, provided they make the best use they can of their reason, and endeavour to live unblamable lives. For we are told, that Christ died for the sins of the whole world; and God is said to be the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe. This may be rationally concluded, also, from what our Saviour says, in the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John; where, speaking of those who rejected him after his having appeared to them, preached to them, and wrought miracles for their conviction, he says, 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.' From hence it is natural to infer, that sin, at least the sin of resisting the light of his gospel, will not be imputed to such persons as that light was never communicated to; such persons as Christ never manifested himself, his religion, or his miracles to. To much the same effect St. Paul says, 'Where no law is, there is no transgression.' From whence we must conclude, that the Heathen are only so far to be condemned for the breach of God's law, as they have means of knowing it; and that a revelation, made to others, puts them, to whom it was never made, in no worse condition than they were before. It is, however, a point that will admit of no question, that if the true religion is necessary to refine human nature, to restore it to its original dignity, and promote its real happiness, Christians must be in an infinitely better condition than Pagans. For although Christianity should, in many re-

spects, be a false religion, yet its bitterest enemies must confess, that it comes incomparably nearer to truth and nature, than Paganism; that its morality is purer, its sanctions stronger, and the ideas it conveys of God and his attributes, juster; and that wherever, throughout the whole world, its preternatural doctrines are not known or admitted, others, of a nature most repugnant to reason, and most destructive of virtue and happiness, are established. Other men may think as they will; but, for my own part, I am clear in this, that natural religion hath a necessary dependence on revelation, and on that part of Christianity which may be called supernatural: for religion, in any sense, is but a name, without a well grounded hope of immortality, which no man ever had, or, for ought we can tell, ever could have had, if some superior being had not revealed it to him. That man who does not believe in his own immortality, can never conceive himself to be any thing else, than a better kind of brute, concerned only in present and sensible things, given up to appetite and passion, and, after a few years existence in vanity and vexation, perishing for ever in the dreadful gulf of annihilation. Yet, to believe the immortality of the soul, and to be convinced we shall account hereafter for our actions to Almighty God by any law, is to all men, for all have sinned, a most shocking article of faith, if an atonement for sin is not also believed in; because it affords us no other prospect, but that of a judgment, wherein, as we must plead guilty, and stand self-convicted, so there is nothing to prevent our being condemned by Almighty God to a punishment, of which we know not the limits, either in point of severity or duration. Now, Mr. Templeton, the doctrine of an atonement carries us directly to that of Christ's incarnation, and a personal distinction in God. This I hope to prove so clearly hereafter, as to convince you, that the mere light of nature, in our present circumstances, can afford us either no religion, or such a one as can serve no other purpose, but that of driving a rational and thinking mind to despair.

Temp. I foresee this part of our controversy will open an extraordinary scene, which I long to be in the midst of.

Dech. You have, indeed, a prodigious taste for the marvellous in religion; and therefore, the more it is decorated

with the scenery and machinery of divine interpositions, the more apt, I am convinced, it will be to take your imagination. For this reason, the poet would be your best apostle, or prophet; and the word *vates* might serve you, as it did the old Romans, to represent him in both capacities.

Shep. By the words, 'divine revelation,' strictly taken, we understand only such religious informations as we could not possibly, or, at least, not without the greatest difficulty, come to the knowledge of by the mere force of our own natural faculties; or, in the lowest sense, we mean, by them, the discovery of such religious truths as mankind in general were actually ignorant of before that discovery was made, whether we suppose the cause of their ignorance to have been neglect, or incapacity. Concerning the incapacity of mankind to find out the true religion, we have said enough, already, for our present purpose; but, as to the neglect of those means which nature alone hath afforded them, in order to this important end, if such there are, it hath been so great and universal, as to make instruction not a whit less necessary, than it would have been, had human nature the benefit of no such means. This must, I think, be acknowledged by those who look on Deism to be the true religion, if they consider how few Deists there are in the world, and how long it was before Deism made its appearance. If we are, therefore, so apt to shut our eyes to the light of nature, we certainly stand in need of somewhat foreign to nature, or above it, to teach us what we will not receive from nature. If such positive institutions, as the sabbath, the sacraments, and a ministry to instruct us, may be highly conducive to this end, the necessity of divine interposition, without which the aforesaid means cannot be effectually instituted, must be granted. It was the noble sentiment of Plato, that 'every dependent nature must be governed by a superior nature;' and, from a thorough knowledge of mankind, he concluded, that 'they must be governed by the Divine Being.' If, therefore, man is enslaved to wickedness by the corruption of his nature, it is not enough that he knows the law of God, which, of himself, he is unable to observe; he must, in order to a due observance of that law, have some assistance from God, sufficient to counterbalance the prevalence of his natural corruption, and make him free. As the

blindness of human understanding requires divine instruction, so the perversity of human will stands in absolute need of divine grace, to bend it back again from its inclination to vice, and set it upright. To deny this latter, is to deny that the passions and appetites have a powerful influence on the will, or that they themselves are corrupt and violent; both of which are, I think, too evident, to be disputed; for all the sins of those who believe in God, and know his law, are a full proof of both, since they shew, that a bare knowledge of God, and his will, are not enough to keep us in our duty, which they fail to do in us all, in proportion as the grace of God is wanted, or resisted. Thus, gentlemen, the assistance, required to make us good and happy, is not only scientifical but practical.

Dech. And so all the good we do, and for which we hope to be rewarded with the joys of heaven, must be done, not by ourselves, but by God. This, I think, is childish.

Temp. I believe you do not understand Mr. Shepherd. He only says, the assistance of God is necessary to counterbalance the corrupt bias in our nature to wickedness, in order to make us free agents; after which, the good we do, is, in some measure, our own, being the effect of a free choice, and therefore may be rewarded.

Shep. You do me justice. To sum and illustrate what hath passed on this latter topic; the book of nature contains the science of divine things; but without instruction we cannot, in the blindness of our present condition, rightly understand its language and characters; after we are taught to understand them, we cannot, without powerful inducements, be prevailed on to peruse and study the contents of that book; and, after we have perused it, we are unable to apply the knowledge, we gather from it, to practice, till the impediments, arising from the corruption of our nature, are removed, or balanced, by divine assistance.

Dech. And when the utmost lights, reason can give us from the book of nature, are attained to, still a second volume is wanting, to teach us mysterious and preternatural religion. It is now near three, so that there is hardly sufficient time left to dress.

DIALOGUE IV.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Temp. SINCE we finished our yesterday's conference, I have been trying to recollect what passed, and to extract from it a settled system of thinking on religious subjects, that may serve me during my whole life. But whether it is that my memory fails me, or that my former high opinion of the natural light still retains a corner of my assent, and from thence batters whatever I attempt to build, I am still considerably embarrassed.

Shep. This is natural. It shews a sensible and ingenuous mind to preserve a mean between too lightly divorcing a former system, and too obstinately declining the espousal of a new one. But, while two opposite principles, at the head of their respective arguments, contend for preference, while the mind, in respect to the decline of former opinions, and the growth of new ones, is as it were moulting, there is a struggle, a disorder, felt in an honest and rational breast, which others are strangers to, who either, through a too easy wantonness of mind, know not how to be chaste to any principle, or through a stupid immobility, remain for ever riveted to their first attachments, although contracted without examination, and, consequently, without sufficient reason or grounds. Your present uneasiness, however, will vanish as soon as it ought, I mean, as soon as the arguments on one side so far preponderate, as to make this yet necessary wariness no longer useful. What Mr. Dechaine said the other day, will hasten the resettlement of your thoughts.

Dech. What, a compliment from Mr. Shepherd!

Shep. A little patience, sir. You said something to this effect; that, as the ends of religion are of more importance to us than the use of our outward senses, the ideas it gives us of God and our duty, ought, if possible, to be more clear and determinate to our reason, than the distinction between colours to our eye. And, indeed, I must confess, if nature were the only canal through which God intended to convey the absolutely necessary knowledge of himself, and all human

duties, its voice would have been made a little louder, and more intelligible, to all men, and all capacities, than we find it is: it must, perhaps, as you have frequently insisted, be so plain, that there could be no controversy about it. Hunger, thirst, love, fear, and other natural motions, are universally strong and evident in all men. Were religious and moral obligations notified to us by our Maker, only through the light of nature, they too would by nature, one should think, be universally evident and incontestable. Yet we find the wisest unassisted men, in all ages, have differed widely about them; and those who trusted most to their own abilities, who rejected traditionary knowledge, and drew all from within themselves, have given the most absurd schemes of religion and morality. If a man were disposed to shut his eyes against all other lights but the natural, and put himself on the mere dictates of philosophy, shall he trust only to his own sentiments and reason? If he does, let him first give back all he hath got by instruction and conversation, by reading, by business, by the laws of his country, &c. and then let us see what his unassisted nature will be able to produce. If he finds it defective, we will allow him all the ancient and modern philosophers, who yet draw the first principles and hints of all they have delivered to the world from instruction, and let him try if he can exact a right system of obligation and duty from their lucubrations. Will he join himself to the Stoics? No, nature refutes their doctrine of apathy, and places a wide difference between pleasure and pain: its infirmities makes their pretensions to infallibility and perfection ridiculous. Shall he herd with the Epicureans? If he does, as religion will be wholly out of the question, and pleasure the only good, he must quit society, which can have no other foundation but religion, and make one among goats or swine, as Horace styles himself, while an Epicurean. But as it is extremely slavish and disagreeable to be wedded to any set of principles, the Pyrrhonian philosophy will relieve him from their ridiculous notions, and also from the endless refinements of the Athenian, Cyreniac, and other schools. But what sort of a father, husband, neighbour, or commonwealth's-man is he to be, who hath no opinions, no principles? Is he, as to matters of religion, to take up with the theology of Egypt, Greece,

Rome, or any other country that contrived a religion, and made gods for itself? No, this will set him on his knees to a parricide, an adultress, a drunkard, a dog, an onion, a wooden, a rotten god, or a devil. Can Socrates or Plato relieve him, and dictate a right religion to him? No, they confess the necessity of revelation. If such men as these are unable to instruct him sufficiently in his duty, and bind it on his conscience with motives and authorities so cogent and awful, as to keep the corrupt tendencies and wild sallies of his nature within due bounds, much less will Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, Plutarch, Hierocles, &c. be able to do it; for they only build on the old philosophers, already found insufficient: and, besides, if in any thing they come nearer to reason, it is evidently owing to the Christian religion, as the reformation of Paganism made by Julian. If he hopes for information from either the religion or philosophy of the ancient Pagan world, he will find himself as much disappointed and out of humour with both, as Lucian was; and if he is of a ludicrous turn, as ready to make a jest of both. If he applies himself to our English philosophers, he will find the greater part of them declaring and arguing strenuously for revelation at one time, and at another, advancing, and endeavouring to maintain, particular schemes of their own, consistent neither with revelation, nor one another. As to the rest, who declare for Deism, he will perceive they borrow all their materials from the former; adopt their inconsistencies; speak for and against revelation, and future rewards and punishments; for and against innate ideas of God, and moral duty; for and against the being of immaterial substances; make the knowledge and obligation of moral duties to arise, some from an internal sense, with Cumberland and Hutcheson; others, from reason, and the fitnesses of things, with Clarke and Balguy; others, from the laws of society, as Hobbes and his followers, who have not even a pretender to Christianity for a precedent. He will find them dealing artfully and doubly in every thing; and, what renders them most unfit for his purposes, referring him entirely to himself, and bantering him with repeated assurances, that he already knows all those matters perfectly well, about which he is seeking with so much solicitude for satisfaction.

Dech. This referring of a man to himself, you may dress

out as ridiculously as you please; and you may teach people to look for the knowledge of themselves without them; but, surely, if any man would know himself, he ought to look within, and converse with himself. It is by that method only that he can perceive his own strength or weakness. He can never know what is amiss with him, till he examines himself. His sentiments and reason speak a plain and expressive language; but if, instead of listening to them, he will ramble about from one quack, or undertaker of minds, to another; if he must needs looks for himself in others, and for the knowledge of his duty in books; it is little wonder, and as little matter, if he spend his days in ignorance. The disorders of our minds proceed from without; and it is in vain to look for our cure from that quarter, from whence the malady is received. If Lord Shaftsbury's advice concerning soliloquy and self-converse were followed, we should want no other instructors but ourselves. Do we not acquire the knowledge of all other things, by considering and examining those things themselves? And do we hope to know what is within us, if we do not consider and examine ourselves? Our duty may be wrote in strong and capital characters upon our own hearts; but if we never read nor peruse ourselves, it will be hard to convince us we have any such provision made for information within; and if we neglect this, as there is no other source of religious or moral knowledge to draw from, we must be for ever in the dark as to our duty, our disorders and their cure. But, no doubt, they, who make a likelihood by prescribing to the souls of men, are in the right to render people as distrustful of themselves as they can, to call them out, from the faithful monitor within, to a slavish dependence on their venal instructions, and to put out their eyes, that they may be paid for leading them about, the Lord knows whither.

Shep. But we parsons recommend nothing more earnestly to our hearers than meditation and self-examination, which are as good as Shaftsbury's soliloquy and self-converse.

Dech. Yes; but you pretend to know us better, than we ourselves. You will needs guide us through our own minds, and are at every turn for finding out disorders, which you alone can cure.

Shep. Some disorders of the mind may be cured, like some distempers of the body, by medicine of its own. But there are others, that require a physician. Besides, it often happens, that we stand in need of advice to direct us how to cure our own bodily ailments, so in like manner we frequently want the skill of some one more knowing than ourselves, to point to us the very natural cures for our mental complaints, that are placed within ourselves, and to teach us how to apply them. The philosophy of Shaftsbury, which he modestly calls 'a revelation made by him to mankind,' consists in seeking out resources within ourselves, which nevertheless he takes upon him to instruct us in the manner of doing. He enlarges very sensibly and agreeably upon the topic of self-converse, in his advice to an author; although, it must be owned, in the most affected terms and phrases. It is true indeed, that a man, in order to be good and happy, ought, by all means, to know himself; and that soliloquy and meditation are absolutely necessary to this important science. But if a man should trust wholly to his own contemplations on himself, ignorance and vanity would infallibly be the result. Without conversing with the world, and putting ourselves to frequent trials by affairs and intercourse with mankind, we can never furnish ourselves with materials for secret meditation. Without having tried our strength, our weakness, our inclinations and aversions, we shall want experiments to reason from. A work of this sort can by no means be effected merely in solitude, and at a distance from the world. He who mixes with the world, hath frequent opportunities of trying his own strength, and seeing in what particularly it consists, and how far he may depend on it. Nor hath he fewer occasions of seeing his own infirmities. This accident puts him in mind, that he is timorous; that adventure discovers to him, that he is envious. This acquaintance lets him know, that he is proud and choleric; that tells him, he is rash and injudicious. Having collected a sufficient stock of such observations, it will be then a proper time for him to meet himself in his closet, or the lonely walk, and cast up the full account of himself; which if he does with impartiality and penetration, he will find in the result, that he is a weak and irregular creature, and cannot depend on himself; that his understanding is dark and short-

sighted, and his passions wild and ungovernable. What then must he do?

Dech. He must arm himself the best he can against such lapses as he may have made on former occasions.

Shep. But he finds, to his great mortification, that he is unable to form resolutions of sufficient firmness to withstand the trials he is to expect, and to subdue the stubbornness of his own degenerate nature; and that, little as he can do to prevent the repetition of his former weaknesses, ne can do still less to defend himself against the attacks of surprise, and unforeseen trials. What resource hath he then in himself, or what supplies of strength can he draw from his own breast, the source of all his infirmities? Why, none at all. They are the irregularities of that very breast he wants to reduce and correct, and can hope for no succours from thence. Which way then is he to turn himself? What ally is he to call in? There is one at hand, and present with him, who neither wants compassion, nor power, to assist him; and that is God. If he is as sensible, as his experience ought to have made him, of his own insufficiency, and humbly applies himself to this never-failing friend of the lowly and sincere in distress, he shall quickly find relief. It is true, this powerful assistant will not appear visibly to him, nor converse with him, as one man does with another; having done that already in his word, where the remedies of all his disorders, and the bridle necessary for all his headstrong irregularities, are set forth to him in the strongest terms; nay, where his own infirmities and corruptions are more truly represented to him, by that wisdom which made and knows him, than it is possible for the most severe scrutiny he can make into himself to do it. There he sees, that his corruptions are original and natural; that his heart is desperately wicked; and that he hath the world, the devil, and his own fleshly lusts, to contend with. There he sees the omnipresence and perpetual inspection of Almighty God into the deepest recesses, and most secret thoughts, of his heart. There he finds the gracious assistance of God in all emergencies, above the strength of nature, by the words of eternal truth faithfully promised to him. Let him then quit his conversation with his deceitful self, and enter into close conference with God, who will not lie to him, like his own

vain and fallacious heart. Do not such and such of my dispositions, he may say, lead me to actions pleasing in the sight of God? And he will not crown those actions, if I perform them, with infinite happiness, and true glory? Do not certain other propensities in my degenerate nature prompt me to actions extremely offensive to him? And are not the punishments he threatens to such, in his word, if I commit them, inconceivably severe? Is he present every where? And will he be with me when I mount the stage of action, as well as here in my closet or walk? What have I then to do, but to imprint on my mind a deep and perpetual apprehension of his presence and inspection? So shall he become to me a continual monitor, or guide, in all I think, speak, or do. My infirmities supplied by his strength; and my passions awed by his majestic presence; I may hope to hold on steadily towards the great purposes and good ends of my being. Here, sir, is a way of establishing, between the soul and God, a most useful and happy intercourse; which no lights from within a man's self are able to introduce him to, nor all the philosophy of the world can point out to him. I will suppose the mere pleasure of doing good, and abhorrence of evil, to be natural, and as strong in all men as you please; but would not our motives to good actions, and detriments to evil ones, be much stronger, if we believed, that a Being of infinite wisdom knew all we thought or did, and would gloriously reward, or terribly punish, all our actions, and even intentions?

Dech. I must own I think so.

Shep. In that case, no secret villanies could hope to escape punished, though they might evade the laws, and screen themselves from the animadversions of men.

Dech. True.

Shep. And a good man on the rack, or in flames, for the cause of truth, or in the service of his country, would have good reason to stand to his purpose, and brave the pains and terrors of death, if he were fully persuaded, that an infinitely gracious and powerful Being stood ready to receive his soul, and cherish it with the tenderness of a most affectionate Father, to all eternity.

Dech. Undoubtedly.

Shep. If all the world were of the same principles with

this man, what a different face, from the present, must you suppose this would put on all the affairs of life! What a heaven would it turn this earth into!

Dech. No doubt, the consequence would be most happy.

Shep. Consider, sir, the passions of men; are they not very strong?

Dech. Yes, generally speaking.

Shep. Consider likewise their understandings; are they not for the most part dark, and incapable either of moderating those passions, or fixing them on proper objects?

Dech. Men themselves are to blame for that.

Shep. Be that as it will, the thing itself is an incontestable fact. But farther, pray, sir, consider habit; does it not add a kind of second nature, nay, rather a sort of necessity, to the passions, when it happens to coincide, and graft itself on them?

Dech. It does indeed.

Shep. Pray tell me, now; are the inconsiderable rewards of the moral sense, although ever so inviolably conferred on good actions, able to bridle such passions and habits, prompted and solicited by greater wealth, honour, and power, than the society can afford to deal out to every man? He, Mr. Dechaine, who foregoes that grandeur which he hath an opportunity of seizing, must expect an equivalent some other way. On the other hand, are the mere reproaches of the moral sense a sufficient bar to a wicked action, when some furious passion rushes to the tempting object, with all the violence of a corrupt nature, and an inveterate habit? Consider Sextus and Cæsar; the first entering the chamber of Lucretia, and the latter on the farther bank of the Rubicon.

Dech. And pray consider Osbert in the chamber with Brocard's wife; Valentinian the Third, with that of Maximus; and Alexander the Sixth, preparing a banquet for his rich cardinals. These, Mr. Shepherd, were Christians, and had your mighty sanction before their eyes.

Shep. Christians I am sure they were not.

Dech. What, were there popes who were no Christians?

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, don't all Christians believe in the omnipresence, omniscience, infinite justice, and power

of God? And do they not expect a judgment to come, with a heaven or hell to follow it?

Dech. I believe they do.

Shep. Could Alexander the Sixth then have been a Christian.

Dech. It does not concern me to say whether they were Christians or not: but surely, if there is any reason for believing in Christ, a pope must be acquainted with it.

Shep. You despise the Papists for pinning their faith on the papal sleeve, and yet do not perceive, that you pin your own infidelity on the very same filthy spot of that sleeve. If we consider the anarchy and misery made by various contending passions in one mind, where avarice and prodigality, anger and fear, pride and envy, struggle for superiority, and distract the soul, we shall find nothing in such a mind capable of procuring peace, or establishing virtue; and therefore, in order either to relieve it from its own grievous disorders, or to prevent its running into the most criminal enormities, the fear of God is to be called in. Let us suppose, Mr. Dechaine, an island peopled by Philip, his son Alexander the Great, Archelaus of Macedonia, the Dionysii, Pisistratus, Siloson, Atreus, Thyestes, Egistheus, Paris, Achilles, Marius, Sylla, Cæsar, Tiberius, Nero, Heliogabalus, Montfort earl of Leicester, Richard the Third, Cromwell, Rhodope, Lais, Parisatis, Cleopatra, Tullia the wife of Tarquin, Agrippina, Messalina, Margaret of France, Catharine de Medicis, and a competent number of such spirits; you will readily grant, I believe, that plots, rapes, treachery, murder, &c. would be the very first things they would lay their heads and hands to.

Dech. That I shall.

Shep. Let reason be called in to regulate and suppress these enormities; will she be able, think you, to do it?

Dech. I believe hardly.

Shep. Introduce philosophy, and let her try her skill; perhaps she may convert the whole island to stoicism and apathy.

Dech. That would be a strange metamorphosis.

Shep. Well; let us suppose these islanders, in order to defend themselves from one another, to enter into a society, and make laws for its support and regulation. What think

you? Will those laws be well observed, and justice duly administered?

Dech. They will be of no use, in my opinion, as the parties are all contemners of law and justice.

Shep. Human expedients, therefore, being of no efficacy, what think you would be the consequence, if God should shew himself on his throne, with heaven and hell in view, to the assembly of these islanders?

Dech. I believe, while such a prospect was before their eyes, they would be as far from committing any sort of wickedness, as an equal number of the very best people that ever lived.

Shep. Yes, all their outrageous passions would immediately subside. Such a view would in an instant bear down the most insolent and rebellious spirits among them. Now faith, sir, when it is strong and lively, puts us in the presence of Almighty God, puts us into the bar, and places heaven and hell in a manner sensibly before us.

Dech. And yet in this very bar people have found the way to be as wicked as elsewhere. Usurpation, murder, treason, poisoning, are Christian, as well as Pagan, enormities.

Shep. Such crimes are less frequent in Christian countries, than they were among the Pagans, as is evident to any man in the least acquainted with history. But have we not already agreed, sir, that if people of the worst dispositions saw God present with them, and watching their behaviour at all times, they could not be guilty of such monstrous actions?

Dech. Yes.

Shep. Have we not also agreed, that if their faith amounted to a full assurance, it would prevent their wickedness, almost as effectually, as if God were always visibly present?

Dech. I believe it possibly might, if their faith was very strong.

Shep. It follows then, that the wicked actions, committed by persons professing themselves to be Christians, were not done by real believers, or Christians.

Dech. And it follows again from thence, that as those wicked professors had an equal opportunity of seeing into

the evidence of Christianity with other Christians, that evidence must be deficient, or they had been believers.

Shep. All I dispute for at present, is the excellent nature and tendency of our religion. If this way of arguing is to be admitted, the Christian evidence must appear very strong; since, by far the greater number of those, to whom it hath been conveyed, were convinced, and restrained, by the faith arising out of that conviction, from all sorts of crimes. It is not only the force of an argument, but also the strength of reason, and candour of mind with which it is received, that produces conviction. Men bred up in Christian countries, but under the unhappy influence of a most untoward nature, of ignorance, luxury, and bad examples, are not likely to lend an open ear to arguments, which, if admitted, must put a severe bridle on all their passions and corruptions. Passion, we may be sure, had in most of those wicked men, who professed Christianity, little or no faith to struggle with, and faith little or no knowledge, candour, or reflection, to found itself on.

Dech. If such may be the failure of a religion that requires to be taught, commend me to that which does not depend on parents, priests, or masters, who may neglect to instruct us, or defeat their own instructions by their bad examples.

Shep. If I found such a religion springing up of itself within me, I should as little trouble myself to inquire farther about religion as you; or, if I found it planted by mere nature in the minds of others, I should certainly spare all the pains I take with my flock.

Dech. If you had not nature for an assistant in teaching these sheep of yours, you could do nothing. She, like a good curate, does all that work, the honour of which you, like other conceited rectors, are willing to take to yourself; I mean, all the work that is worth the doing, that is, making honest men. But as the Christian methods of making men honest are continually canted up to the people, and not a word said to them about their own internal and natural principles, they themselves come at length to ascribe their honesty to your instructions, though, in reality, it proceeds entirely from their own natures. Thus the physician, who prescribes a little powder of liquorice, perhaps a bolus of

brickdust, or some other trifle, is paid for the cure, though it is wrought entirely by the strength of nature. Doctor, I will tell thee a parable, which may serve to illustrate this matter better to thee, than any thing I know. A certain poor man travelling homeward with two or three of his children, they grew lazy, and complained they were not able to proceed any farther. Upon which the father cut horses for them from the neighbouring hedge, and, having mounted his children thereon, they finished their journey with great briskness.

Shep. This, I think, will not prove that real horses are not necessary on some occasions. In matters of a low and sensible nature, such as painting or geometry, we require to be taught, in order to a short and easy acquisition of knowledge; although mankind, by improving, one on the inventions of another, can make a considerable progress, and may at length arrive to perfection in such matters. But then it is because the objects of those, and such like arts, are perpetually in their sight; and their properties, so far as is needful for their purposes, easily enough discovered. But it is otherwise in respect to religion, the objects and first principles of which lie a little farther out of the reach of apprehension; so far, indeed, that it is a question with many, whether it is possible to arrive at them by the strength of our unassisted faculties. This, sir, makes a wide difference. We can discover a natural beauty in sensible objects with an eye untaught; but there are other beauties, which most people never see, till they are pointed out to them, and, it may be, not perfectly even then. A right or wrong in actions, which some affect to call a beauty or deformity, may, in some glaring cases, be discovered by a mind uninstructed; but, in other cases, this discovery, either through the natural obscurity of the distinction between right and wrong, or for expedition's sake, requires to be made by instruction. Yet, when this distinction, whether by nature or teaching, is discovered, unless other discoveries, still more difficult, are made at the same time, it carries nothing of morality or obligation with it, and is almost useless; because few people, if any, will do that which is right, merely because it is so; or abstain from that which is wrong, purely because it is wrong. But if you

annex honour and profit to the first, and shame and punishment to the last, I mean, such as temporal laws can confer or inflict, these will superinduce that kind of obligation called civil, and that only. This obligation, however, will be very insufficient, unless these rewards and punishments can, by some means or other, be constantly and equitably administered; and unless the legal honour and profit, or shame and suffering, are considerably and apparently greater than the honour and profit to be got by doing ill, and the shame and suffering, that may, in many cases, attend the doing well. Mankind are influenced and determined in their actions, as Shaftsbury, Tindal, and all men, who know either themselves, or others, allow, by self-love. Now the higher the rewards of doing good, and the punishments of doing ill, are carried, the stronger the tie to good actions becomes. If they are infinite, the tie to virtue becomes infinitely strong, when it is duly apprehended. But, as I said, care must be taken to have a due administration of these encouragements to virtue, and detriments to vice; otherwise they will, in proportion to the defects of this administration, lose of their force. Now this can never be provided for, without infinite wisdom, justice, and power, in the aforesaid administration. As soon as God, who alone is possessed of those high attributes, is known, or believed to preside over the world, and to prepare such rewards for virtue, and punishments for vice; then, and not till then, the distinction between right and wrong becomes religious, moral, and obligatory; and it also becomes the interest, and must be the choice, of every truly rational being, to act in pursuance of that distinction on all occasions, and against all the temptations this world can throw in its way. I return, gentlemen, to this argument, after having spoken to it more than once before, because I am sensible Deism is mainly founded on, and chiefly recommended to the looser part of mankind, by a disbelief of future eternal rewards and punishments; and because in this article of our faith consists the marrow and force of all religion. The arguments therefore for it, although they are clearly demonstrative, can never be too often, or too pressingly, inculcated, especially as there is, in the depravity of human nature, a strong reluctance to them.

Dech. I am sure you must be little acquainted with the writings of our Deists, or you would own they speak in the highest terms of religion, and of future punishments and rewards, as things taken for granted.

Shep. It is true, Shaftsbury, in his inquiry into virtue, speaks favourably of future rewards and punishments, and of religion, in general terms; nay, and even of the difficulty of finding out God.[a] Both he and Tindal, when for the present, to recommend their systems, they turn their best side to us, say, the law of nature is universally clear, intelligible, and perfect; yet, in numberless places, when they would either run down the instructions given by others, or exalt their own, talk abundantly of the moral ignorance and barbarism of mankind, and of the necessity of instruction.[b] They both, as I have already shewn, labour to prove, that virtue is its own perfect reward, and vice its own perfect punishment, in this life; that the religion and law of nature are perfect, and a rule of action to God himself; that we ought to love God for his own sake, and not for the rewards he gives.[c] I grant, we ought to love God for his own excellence, as the most amiable of all objects, and would love him infinitely more than all things, were we as inclinable, as we ought to be, to love that most which is best, and did we know him as well as we do other things: but ought we not also to love him for the favours we have already received from him? And surely this love ought not to hinder, but rather strongly excite, our utmost endeavours to serve and please him, on account of the good things he hath promised, and the miseries he hath threatened. As to our loving virtue for its own sake, which Shaftsbury speaks of, as distinct from the love of God; I can only say, that as some love, and others hate it, no matter whether by nature or habit, the love of it can never be put on a more natural, a more safe, and generous footing, than to love it because it is the will of God. Nor can we have any reason for hating vice so strong, as because God hates it, and will punish it. He who places the judgment of God, and eternal indignation at vice, before his eyes, walks by a wise and safe rule. Surely it is the most reasonable thing in the world for a poor weak man,

[a] Book the first, p. 3. 54. [b] Adv. to an Author, vol. i. p. 299.
[c] Chr. as Old as the Creation, ch. 7.

who knows himself to be every moment in danger of transgressing, to fear the displeasure of an infinitely wise, just, and powerful Judge. If, however, this fear be strong and uniform, it will preserve the man, who is blessed with it, in his duty; and, in a little time, infallibly guide him up, through virtue, and an innocent conscience, to the love of God. Having once attained to this height, he hath then the noblest principle in the world to act on. He denies himself, as vile and unworthy; he goes out from himself, as a low and despicable creature; and, transported with the most pure and exalted of all emotions, fixes his heart on the most illustrious and glorious of all beings, the most gracious of all benefactors, the source of all good, and the centre of all duty and happiness. As he does not consider himself, or his own reason, as his legislator and master, so he does not seek to gratify or obey himself. As he does not look upon a patron, or a king, to be the first object of his services, so his attachments are not so much to parties or kingdoms, as to the whole intellectual world, of which God is the head and Father. A Christian, it is true, hath greater reason to fear God, than a Deist; but, as he knows God to be the farthest of all beings from tyranny, so his fear can never become slavish; but is usually the beginning of true wisdom, which banishes all other fears; and although it springs from this low and humble principle, yet it rears itself to heaven, and ripens into divine love. A Christian hath also infinitely stronger reasons for loving God, than the light of nature, though you suppose it ever so great, can dictate to a Deist. For what can nature tell the latter, but that God hath made him; impressed a law on his heart, by which he will justly judge him; and either given him, or left him to such sinful dispositions, as make it impossible for him to conform himself to that law? This is a most shocking information, and tends strongly downward to despair or Atheism. But the Christian is informed by his religion, that God schemes for his happiness with the tenderness of a most compassionate Father; that his Son hath taken the nature of man upon him, and, by a most painful death, made atonement for his sins to divine justice, and thereby delivered him from the dreadful curse of the law; and that the Spirit of God, knowing the manifold infirmities of human nature, like a kind

and faithful friend, leads him, as it were, by the hand, through all the temptations and dangers of this wretched life. Here is a foundation for the sweetest hopes, and inducements to the most ardent love. Our libertines, in order to put a specious face on their destructive system, speak highly of benevolence, of humanity, of public love; and shew as little of it in their actions, as any sort of men on earth. But were their benevolence really as extensive as their pretences, it could reach no farther than the boundaries of this narrow world, nay, not so far, but only to such as have not, by any real or fancied injury, provoked their resentment; and what is this to Christian charity, that does good for evil, prays for its persecutors, and forms one universal society of God, of angels, of dead and living saints, of all, in short, that is good, either in heaven or on earth? The benevolence of a Deist terminates, at best, in man; but may be shewn to an unworthy object, may be perverted into a vile affection by the mixture of other passions, and hath always the lowest kind of self-interest, mere temporal preservation and well-being, which mankind, united in society, mutually promote for one another, as its only motive; and, consequently, whenever a man is severely treated, or basely used, by the world, turns to downright misanthropy.

Dech. No, sir; natural benevolence still warms the heart with sentiments of humanity for even bad men and enemies; and natural justice will not suffer us to hate one man, on account of the injuries we have received from another.

Shep. Whatever nature may do in a Deist, when left to itself, it may, surely, do as much in a Christian, who is obliged, moreover, by an express command, to love his enemies, and do good for evil. It is a dictate of nature, to hate our enemies; and it is an infirmity too incident to nature, to be often out of humour, even with our friends and benefactors: but Christian charity, having God for its chief object, and loving mankind, not so much on their own account, as for the sake of God, with eternal happiness and celestial glory for its motive, is in no danger of being perverted by low and unworthy views or affections, nor of being destroyed by disgust. As God is the only source of all good, so he ought to be the principal and final object of all love; the centre to which all the thoughts, desires, and actions, of in-

telligent beings ought to point. As lines, tending directly to one common centre, can never divaricate, nor obstruct one another, but must still draw nearer and nearer, the more they approach towards that centre; so, in like manner, all true Christians, endeavouring to approach the universal object of love, instead of being carried out of their way by other objects, so as to interfere with, and cross one another, perpetually draw nearer and closer together. All virtue consists in holding on steadily towards this grand point of view, and all the degrees of virtue in the swifter or slower, the more or less constant, tendency of this pursuit, and all vice in deviating from it to other views or ends. As all lines, meeting in a common centre, unite and lose themselves therein; so, when all our views, affections, and courses, meet in God, we shall there find true charity and union with him, and all that are his: we shall rejoice to lay aside that particular self, which hath hitherto been the motive of all we did, and becoming one with God, shall, to all eternity, have no other self but him. Now, as no line can be drawn towards a centre, but on some substratum, or area; so no man can come to God, but through his Son. It is by the rectitude and strength of his covenant, and the saving merits of his death alone, that man, weak and unworthy in himself, can possibly come to God.

Dech. After all you have said about Christian charity, I cannot see that you found it, or any other Christian principle, on aught else than mere self-love, between which and charity there seems to be so great a contrariety, as makes it impossible for the one to arise out of the other.

Sech. Both Shaftsbury and Tindal, far as they carry the principle of benevolence, makes self-love the supreme principle in man:[a] it is, however, certain, that this, like all our other affections, being blind in itself, requires the assistance of reason to direct its motions towards such objects and means as may promote the real happiness, and not merely gratify the mistaken or depraved appetites, of the man. And if the greatest happiness of man is placed beyond the sight of reason, then reason itself stands in need of information and direction. If man had no other principle but that of

[a] Christ. Old as Creat. ch. 2. Shafts. vol. i. p. 310.

self-love, which is the opinion of many, and that were sufficient to make him good and happy, as far as a mere motive is capable of contributing to that end; in that case, we should have no occasion to inquire about any other principle or motive. But I think it easy to shew, that we have also a principle of benevolence, or charity; and as easy, likewise, to trace this principle of charity to self-love, as its true source, notwithstanding the contrariety you apprehend between them, which, if I am not greatly mistaken, never happens, but through some error of judgment, that leads us to a wrong kind of self-love, or charity. Do not you love him, sir, who does you some considerable service, or good office?

Dech. I do.

Shep. And does not your love proceed from the pleasure he gives you by that act of kindness?

Dech. No doubt it does.

Shep. It is therefore the love of yourself that produces love in you towards your benefactor; and does not this love, thus produced, move you sometimes to make him such returns as are a real loss to yourself, of money, interest, or somewhat else, on which you set a value?

Dech. I never consider those returns as losses, because they gratify my love.

Shep. You certainly do; for I believe you will own, you would rather choose to shew your gratitude, if it could be done, and would answer his occasions as well, by services that would cost you nothing. Beside, to gratify your love for him, is, strictly speaking, as selfish, as gratifying your love for any thing else; for, in such cases, you love the object for the good you derive from it, and you carry your love into execution, on account of the pleasure you find in so doing. What is it induces you to love your own, rather than a foreign country?

Dech. My life, my liberty, my property, are all defended by my own, and often attacked by other countries.

Shep. Would you risk your fortune, or your life for your country?

Dech. Yes, if I thought, by so doing, I should render it any signal service.

Shep. It appears, then, that you love your country only

because you love yourself; and that self-love may induce a man to sacrifice even his life.

Dech. But what is it makes me love mankind in general?

Shep. It is a doubt with me, whether you love all mankind, or not; and whether you do not love only those, from whom you have received, or hope to receive, some benefit; and hate those who have done, or are likely to do, you an injury.

Dech. But I do love those, from whom I neither have received, nor hope to receive, any services, merely because they are men.

Shep. There is, I own, such a thing as natural affection in men towards one another; but whether this affection springs from self-love, is a question not easily decided. You love mankind, perhaps, because they are men; that is, because they are men like yourself, and like those you love: this sort of affection, however, which is not very strong, is almost wholly habitual, and may proceed originally from self-love. You are a man, and therefore, according to the saying of the comedian, you think every thing that relates to mankind concerns yourself, in some measure.

Dech. Upon your selfish principle, those men, such as Codrus, and the Decii, who sacrificed their lives purely for others, must have been mad.

Shep. If those persons did not hope for a reward in another world, of more value than life, they were certainly the most vain-glorious and delirious of all mankind. No sober man gives away his fortune, nor even a part of it, for nothing; much less will he sacrifice his life, for which any man in his senses would give up all his fortune, though it were ever so great, till he is strongly possessed with hopes of an equivalent. He is absolutely mad, who, when he might avoid it, without any such hopes, runs himself into dangers or distresses, or gives up life itself; and he is next to a madman, or a fool, who does the same on precarious hopes of an equivalent. Those libertines who are at a great deal of pains to banish from the minds of others the hopes and fears of futurity, are little better than mad: for what are they to get for all their trouble? what recompense for the infamous character of seducers, since infidelity hath no rewards? The

principle of self-love, and self-preservation, is certainly the most powerful of all our instincts; of which, if they must be called laws, this is certainly the first. He that denies this, and says he loves others better than himself, is either a fool, or a liar. If, merely for a friend, a mistress, or the public, he sacrifices his life, he is a fool, who grossly mistakes his own interest; or a madman, who knowingly acts against it. No wise man gives up his self-interest in one thing, but in order to promote it in another, that seems greater, or more certain. As to life, there is no equivalent for it but eternal life; and as we can have no tolerable assurance of that but by revelation, so no man can rationally choose death, but upon Christian principles. No man, therefore, can attain to true heroism, but the Christian; he alone can have reason to deny himself the honours, profits, and pleasures of this world, which dishonesty, or evil arts, might offer him; or to meet death, with all its terrors, from which cowardice or treachery might deliver him.

Dech. Your picture of a Christian hero makes him but a mere mercenary.

Shep. And yours, of any other sort of hero, makes him an errant madman, or a fool.

Dech. There can be no hero without virtue, nor virtue without disinterestedness. That is, no doubt, a fine sort of virtue and heroism, which encounters a less evil for fear of a greater, and which, in hopes of an infinite reward, surrenders a trifling interest or pleasure. At this rate, the most narrow-hearted miser, the basest coward, or even the vilest thief, may be set up for a hero.

Shep. It is true, they might, if they had sense enough to see and consider their greatest interest: and surely nothing, sir, can so strongly recommend any principle as that; if it were heartily closed with, it would infallibly transform the very worst of men into saints and heroes. We may say, on the other side, that yours is a most glorious kind of virtue, that is either unable to prevail on a man voluntarily to undergo the slightest suffering; or, if it does, makes it folly and distraction in him to do it.

Dech. Is he, then, a fool, who suffers for virtue? Or he an honest man, who is hindered from stealing merely by the gallows?

Shep. These questions are only calculated to amuse. He, sir, is a fool, who suffers death for a name; and virtue, without religion, without love for, and dependence on God, without any manner of good to be found in it, or derived from it, is but a mere name. He who is kept from stealing only by the gallows, is far from being honest; because he will lie, perjure, cheat, and steal too, as often as he can do it with hopes of escaping the gallows. But he who abstains from stealing, and all other immoral actions, because he is sure God will see and punish the committal of them, will never commit an ill action; and he who will never do an ill action, is certainly a very honest man; nay, he loves a good action, and hates an ill one, on account of their consequences, and because God does: and therefore the gallows, or any other kind of punishment, is not all he considers. You will own, nevertheless, that he who is deterred from stealing by the fear of the gallows, is a good man, in comparison of him who steals under the very gallows. But he is better, who, in hopes of a glorious reward, as well as for fear of a most grievous punishment, resists temptations, denies himself unlawful pleasures, and does all the good he can. And he is best of all, who, having the inferior affections and passions bridled by the prospect of eternal punishments and rewards, raises the soul itself, by love and gratitude, to a noble desire and endeavour to please God, as the most beneficent and amiable of all beings. This man admires the beauty of a good, and abhors the foulness of an ill action, as much, nay, more than any man, who is less religious; because, whatsoever lights mere nature may lend other men to see them with, he hath the same; and, besides, considers the one as infinitely displeasing, and the other as extremely acceptable, to that Being, whose goodness he loves, and whose power he reveres, above all things. Any goodness, in the natural man, is a compliment to his own nature, and to himself; but the goodness of a Christian is love and duty to his greatest friend and benefactor: his hopes and fears do honour to God, because they are so many testimonies of confidence and veneration for Almighty God, founded on faith in his own laws. They are less selfish, too, than the pretended virtue of the self-sufficient and natural man (which makes him his own director, his own governor, his

own punisher and rewarder), inasmuch as they terminate without himself, in that gracious Being, to whom he is infinitely beholding, in that just Judge, from whom he can hope for neither connivance nor partiality, such as a deceitful heart might be apt to shew itself.

Although I cannot help thinking it hath been clearly proved, that the mere light of nature, as we now find it in ourselves, is unable to furnish us with a sufficient standard for our moral conduct, not to say an adequate law, to regulate the actions of men, and that the Christian religion does actually prescribe a sufficient law; it will be farther useful to observe, that the thoughts of men, in regard to any internal law, will be always mainly influenced by their sentiments concerning the chief good. Whatsoever power or force may do, in respect to the outward actions of a man, nothing can oblige him to think, or act, as often as he is at liberty, against what he takes to be his chief good, or interest. No law, nor system of laws, can possibly answer the end and purpose of a law, till the grand question, What is the chief happiness and end of man, be determined, and so cleared up, that every one may be fully satisfied about it. Before our Saviour's time, the world was infinitely divided on this important head: the philosophers were miserably bewildered in all their researches after the chief good. Each sect, each subdivision of a sect, had a chief good of its own, and rejected all the rest. They advanced, as Varro tells us, no fewer than two hundred and eighty-eight opinions in relation to this matter; which shews, by a strong experiment, that the light of nature was altogether unable to settle the difficulty. Every man, if left to the particular bias of his own nature, chooses out a chief good for himself, and lays the stress of all his thoughts and actions on it. Now if the supposed chief good of any man should lead him, as it often does, to violate the laws of society, to hurt others, and to act against the general good of mankind; he will be very unfit for society, and, consequently, as he cannot subsist out of it, an enemy to himself. Robbers, thieves, assassins, rebels, are all instances of this; and so are also those more cunning, but more dangerous persons, who know how to evade the laws, or even, by their assistance, to gain unjust

advantages to themselves, and hurt society. As self is, unquestionably, the ruling principle of man, it is highly necessary to every man to know in what his main interest consists, and how to obtain it: and as that happiness (if we allow the world to be the work of a wise and beneficent Author) must be such, as is consistent with the happiness of others; so it cannot be riches, pleasure, honour, power, or any thing else, about which mankind may be tempted to contend; and yet it must be one and the same to all men: for we cannot imagine there is a distinct kind of chief good or happiness allotted to every individual. But what it is, or by what means to be arrived at, is a question, which, if nature; reason, or philosophy, could have done it, might have been determined long before our Saviour came into the world.

Dech. How the ancient philosophers came to differ so widely about this matter, I cannot guess; but this I am sure of, that nothing is more plain and obvious to reason, than that the chief 'happiness of man consists in living up to the dictates of his nature.'[a] I will, for the present, grant you, that the principle from which all human actions flow, is the desire of happiness. Now 'the happiness of all beings whatever consists in the perfections of their nature; and the nature of a rational being is most perfect, when it is perfectly rational. God, who does nothing in vain, would in vain have planted the desire of happiness in mankind, if he had not given them reason to distinguish such actions as make for their happiness, from such as oppose it.' I have here given you, sir, the right notion of our chief end and good; and you will allow, I believe, that I have not been beholding to revelation for it.

Shep. But Tindal, from whom you borrow it, and whose revelations are, I find, of more authority with you than those of the Scriptures, took the principle upon which he falsely concludes this to be our chief happiness from revelation. He says, 'We are made in the image of God;' which, I am sure, neither he, nor any man else, could have known, had he not been told it by revelation. He says, moreover, and produces no other reasons for it but a bold passage from Dr. Scot, that 'the happiness of God consists in the purity and

[a] Christ. Old as Creat. chap. 3.

rectitude of his nature; and, consequently, as man is made in the image of God, the happiness of man must be nothing else but the perfection of his own nature.' And hath the great Tindal, at length, by the force of his own natural reason, settled the grand difficulty that distracted all the geniuses of antiquity? To the eternal confusion of himself, and all other abettors of natural light, he hath taken the maxim, on which he hath built his hypothesis, from that very revelation he brings it to refute; and can no otherwise support his consequence, but by determining in what the happiness of God consists, which God himself only knows. But this definition of the chief good is neither that good itself, nor even the means of obtaining it. Let us suppose futurity out of the question, and we shall quickly find, that the most perfect man alive, in the rage of a fever, in the pangs of the stone or gout, or stretched on the rack, with no hope of an hereafter, is far enough from being in the enjoyment of the greatest happiness. Now the best of men are as little exempted from poverty, oppression, sickness, pain, and other natural evils incident to this life, as other people; perhaps I might say, with truth, they are rather more exposed to them. You make the perfection and happiness of a man to consist in the perfection of his reason. Pray, hath not man other faculties besides reason, such as apprehension, imagination, memory?

Dech. He hath.

Shep. Hath he not, also, passions, appetites, instincts, &c.?

Dech. He hath.

Shep. In his present state he hath a body too. Now I should think, though his faculty of reason were ever so perfect in itself, yet, if his apprehension be dull or confused, his imagination irregular and wild, his memory weak and irretentive, his passions, appetites, and instincts, corrupt and vitiated, and his body unsound and sickly, he is very far from being perfect.

Dech. In that case, sir, his reason cannot be perfect; and therefore, when we say, the reason of a man is perfect, we mean, that all his inferior faculties, his passions, and his body, which are the instruments of his reason, are sound, and in good order.

Shep. Reason, I find, is very comprehensive; and a sickly man is always a bad reasoner: let this, however, pass. Pray, sir, is reason given us in order to any end or purpose?

Dech. Yes; that we may form right judgments of things.

Shep. What is the use of right judging?

Dech. Right judging is, in order to right acting.

Shep. And is it of any advantage to us to act rightly?

Dech. It is that alone can make us happy.

Shep. Right reasoning, then, is not our happiness, but only the means of our happiness, and not the only means, neither: for if, after having reasoned rightly, we do not act as rightly, which often happens; the better we reason, the less excusable we are, and, consequently, the farther from happiness, if happiness follows virtue only. Neither do the means of our chief happiness consist in living up to the dictates of our nature: nature often dictates such actions to us as are evil in themselves, and, if done, would destroy us. Lust, pride, wrath, ambition, envy, are all natural to us; and the most sensible libertines I ever conversed with, called so many of our passions and appetites, as they themselves delighted in the gratification of, the laws of God and nature. He who obeys these dictates of his nature, adds the fuel of habit to their fire, which was but too violent before, and will be far enough from arriving, by these means, at either the perfection, or happiness of man.

Dech. Is it criminal to gratify the passions, or appetites, which God hath given us? Or hath he given us such as are evil?

Shep. No; but our passions and affections are not as he made them; they are corrupt, and prone to the wildest excesses; and, to gratify such, in the full extent of their natural dictates, would be highly criminal.

Dech. What is our reason given us for, but to regulate our passions and desires according to the eternal fitnesses of actions and things, of which reason is the only judge allowed us?

Shep. Reason alone, even when it judges best, is not able to bridle our headstrong passions; and, as it is extremely subject to prejudice and error, it is oftener found, among men who follow nature, in the inferior office of pur-

veying for the gratification of the passions, and apologizing for their vices, than in that of curbing and subduing them. It is true, while things remain as they are, there is an unalterable fitness and unfitness in actions; it is also true, that reason is the immediate dictator of what is fit, or otherwise: but then reason is unable to dictate rightly, till she herself is instructed; and, when she dictates best, it is without effect, till she is backed by some authority and strength superior to her own. Every finite nature, as Plato hath observed, must, in order to its perfection and true happiness, be governed by some superior nature. Man left wholly to himself, will only degenerate, and fall from bad to worse. If he will not suffer himself to be led to perfection by his Maker, he must sink into an utter depravity.

Dech. And pray, sir, what is the *summum bonum* of Christians?

Shep. The enjoyment of God to all eternity.

Dech. And are not the perfections of our nature, and the enjoyment of God, one and the same thing?

Shep. No more than a good ear is the pleasure of music: the rectitude and perfection of nature is not our happiness; it is only previous and necessary to it.

Dech. Is it not, then, the means of our happiness?

Shep. It is the immediate means; but acting up to the mere dictates of our nature, instead of raising nature to its true dignity and perfection, will only serve to corrupt and debase it.

Dech. I still think your chief good too selfish to be the foundation of true virtue, which all men ought to love for its own sake.

Shep. You may think as you will; but to love virtue, because it produces a conformity of our nature to that of God, and of our actions to his will; and because, by these means, it makes us happy; is a most rational and noble principle; is, in short, the only principle that can teach us to despise ourselves. How proud is man, when none are present, but such as are inferior to him in understanding and dignity! when he is with those whom he knows to be his superiors in wisdom and goodness, he shrinks in, and begins to think humbly and meanly of himself. Bring him into the presence of God, and he immediately loaths and

despises himself, and turns all his love and admiration to an object infinitely more excellent and glorious. Now faith, by placing us in the presence and inspection of God, fills us with humility, and distrust of ourselves, and love for God; which two dispositions are the most powerful means to perfect our nature here, and to make us happy hereafter. Does not nature dictate to every man the pursuit of his own good, preferably to every thing else?

Dech. Yes; but she, also, bids him be kind and beneficent to other men.

Shep. Whatever it is that bids us be beneficent to others, it only so far obliges us to beneficence, as doing good to others is consistent with our own good.

Temp. The distinct provinces of self-interest and humanity, or benevolence; their sometimes opposing, and sometimes resulting from, each other; their respective powers and operations, points already touched on, are still but imperfectly apprehended by my understanding: the clearing up of these might be a great step towards settling the grand questions about our chief good, and the ruling principle of our actions.

Shep. Taking human nature as we find it, and considering it with due attention and candour, we must, I think, conclude, that the grand, or, rather, only principle of a man's actions, is the desire of his own happiness. It is through this that other principles, which seem opposite to it, are enabled to operate upon the soul. In every man there is a set of instincts, or appetites, accommodated to particular objects; such as hunger, thirst, curiosity, &c. that draw in the ruling principle towards the centre, and employ it in providing for the gratification and preservation of himself. There is, also, in him, another set of instincts, or affections; such as humanity, gratitude, compassion, &c. that dilate his ruling principle, and call it forth to objects which promise a more generous gratification, although not so immediately connected with the preservation of himself: the instincts, or affections, of both classes, operate upon him by pain, till they are carried into execution, and then by pleasure. It is equally to relieve himself from this pain, and to enjoy this pleasure, that he feeds the poor, or himself. It is a great error to imagine, that any of these instincts, whe-

ther of the former or latter class, such, for instance, as humanity or compassion, are by nature contrary to self-love; they are only inlets to a noble kind of self-gratification, and engines to play off the energy of the ruling principle to a distance from the individual. Considered either as the one, or the other, they serve, under self-love, to excellent purposes; employing all its force in acts of benevolence, which are sometimes so widely extended, and carried to such a height, as to constitute the hero, the patriot, or the martyr. It is only by mistake that any affection or appetite, of either class, ever runs counter to the real interest of the man, or prevails on his self-love to operate against his own natural end, the chief good of the individual.

Temp. I begin to comprehend your system, and shall have a perfect idea of it, if you will tell me particularly how it is, that self-love produces charity, or becomes the ruling principle of social affection.

Shep. Self-love does not produce charity, for charity is an inherent instinct of the heart, as well as self-love, but subordinate to it: but I can easily tell you how self-love produces an act of charity. When you see a person in misery, the tie of a common nature, that binds you to him, fills you with pain, which you naturally desire to exchange for the pleasure you expect in relieving him. These sensations, awaken the ruling principle, which instantly seeks its own relief and pleasure in the relief and comfort of your fellow-creature: but if you expect that your act of charity will be regarded, by Almighty God, as the act of a faithful steward, as an act of gratitude to him, in thus relieving the distresses of his beloved creature; your ruling principle is then employed by a double motive, and exercises all its force. As to your other inquiry, how it is that self-love becomes the ruling principle of social affection; I answer, that, evenin a state of nature, as we love mankind, we seek to gratify ourselves in conversing with them, and entering into a mutual intercourse of good offices. Besides, it must be observed, that self-preservation strongly enforces the necessity of society to man, who cannot subsist apart from others; and benevolence still farther qualifies him for a social life. But a man very often thinks the interest of the public opposite to his own, and, whenever he does, prefers the latter, because

the pursuit of his own good is his first and strongest principle. Now the light of nature does not always point out his real good to him, nay, hath never been able to direct him to his chief good. Hence it comes, that the good of one man is often set in opposition to the good of another, to the hinderance and damage of both; and in opposition to that of the public, to the destruction of society. It is in vain to say, that while men regard no higher will than their own, and look no farther forward than the present life, they will have any other good in view, than such as is found in this life, or that they will ever consider the good of society as their own, farther than as it actually and visibly, and, I may say, immediately promotes their own. I entered into society, says man, for my own sake, and not for the sake of others; and if the society is against me, as it thwarts my ends, I will be against it. So Phalaris, Syloson, Cæsar, Cromwell, reasoned; so all men reason, who break or evade the laws. What does nature say all the while? Why it pushes them violently towards their own good, and mere reason does not shew them any greater good than the enjoyment of much power, and the possession of much wealth. It is likewise in vain to say, that nature proves her dictates to be the voice of God: they are often wicked and contradictory, and she is ignorant of God, and consequently of the chief good. Yet whatever the nature and reason of man take to be his chief good, towards that they eagerly hurry him over all public regards: hence lawsuits, fraud, violence, oppression, rapine, wars.

Dech. Yes, among Christians as well as Heathens.

Shep. I imagined I had already sufficiently demonstrated, that such persons as are guilty of the most enormous crimes, cannot be Christians. It is the misfortune of this sort of debates, that a point already proved must be proved over again, and yet still be questioned. Was Cromwell a Christian, who prostituted only the mere enthusiastic pretence of religion to tyranny and usurpation? A Christian, truly such, believes his chief good to consist in pleasing God, and enjoying him for ever; and with this infinite good in view he cannot, as a Christian, do injustice for the sake of any thing in this world, nor indeed be much affected with mere worldly considerations and attachments, although ever so equitable

in their tendency. When faith is as strong as the evidence of Christianity ought to make it, and the interest of the man, or of men in general, require it should be, it carries the views and attachments of him whom it possesses to matters of infinite consequence. But where it is weak, in proportion to that weakness the natural man prevails over the Christian, and so it comes to pass, that those vices and crimes that are really owing to the depraved nature of the man, and the weakness of his faith, are often, but ignorantly and maliciously, ascribed to the weakness of our religion; whereas nothing can be more plain, than that if Christianity were duly attended to, duly believed and obeyed, such enormities would never happen. The societies of this world are considered by Christianity only as probationary and preparative to the universal society above; so that none are to be admitted there, but such as have proved themselves amenable, and just, and beneficent here; who have postponed their own fleshly wills to that of God, their own pleasures to his commands, their temporal and private interests to the general interest of mankind, and to a much nobler and higher interest of their own, in a life of infinitely greater importance. Upon the whole, that the enjoyment of God is the chief happiness of man, may appear evident from these considerations: First, that man is by nature made capable of knowing God: and he who knows God, must be sensible he is infinitely more excellent and amiable, than all other beings; and that it is the greatest happiness to enjoy him. Secondly, as nothing can give him an enjoyment of God, but the refinement and perfection of his own nature; so nothing but the knowledge of God, and the most ardent love for him, can prompt and enable him to labour effectually in the adorning and perfecting his own nature. If he knows God, he hath the noblest example to copy after, and the fairest original to transcribe from, that the whole system of being can afford; and, as he knows it is impossible to enjoy God without being pure as he is pure, and perfect as he is perfect, he hath the most powerful inducement to watch over himself, to cleanse his corrupted nature, and fit his soul for those all-seeing eyes, that cannot behold iniquity; and that piercing light, which shines through all things, and lays open every secret. Lastly, he considers with himself,

that, if he can but obtain the favour of God, and be admitted to the blessed vision of this glorious Being, he shall have infinite wisdom to direct him, infinite power to defend him from all evil, and infinite goodness to bestow on him new occasions, and eternal accessions of happiness. All other considerations that can be offered to self-love, shrink into nothing, when compared to this. The opportunities of indulging his other good dispositions will be equally great and happy. He will have infinite excellence to admire and love. He will have power, commensurate with his love and gratitude, to serve his great Benefactor, and the delightful satisfaction of being always sure his services will be well accepted by his gracious and indulgent Master. He will receive infinite favours, and have it also in his power to shew he is grateful, which, to a generous soul, is the most exalted perfection human happiness can arrive at. He will be present when new worlds are made; and, looking into the causes of things, will see more in one moment than Newton, in his whole life, was able to guess at; he will feast his transported soul with the wonders of creating wisdom and power. Yet great as this happiness will be, if speaking by comparison I should say it will make but a small part of his enjoyments, I should say the truth; for he shall see God. All that is great, or delightful, or glorious, is summed up in this. The hopes of it are sufficient to turn this otherwise unhappy life into a paradise, and change the martyr's fiery furnace into a bed of roses; and the thing itself is what the language of mortals is unable to utter, or the heart of man to conceive. Is it from this glorious prospect that libertinism would turn our eyes downward upon a wretched world, and fix our affections on things below? And shall libertinism call itself philosophy and wisdom? Yes; but God calls it 'the wisdom of this world,' and tells us it is foolishness. It is the child of vain curiosity, and false appetite; and continues, as it began, to feed on forbidden fruit, and teach its admirers the knowledge of sin.

It surprises me not a little, that the ancient philosophers, who inquired with so much anxiety and debate after the chief good, should have given themselves little or no trouble about the greatest evil; for self-love is as much concerned

to know, and self-preservation to avoid, the one, as it is to pursue the other. Besides, as a prudent man will voluntarily forego a smaller good to obtain a greater, and give up all occasions of limited pleasure or satisfaction to obtain an infinite good, so will he also undergo a small evil to avoid a greater; and encounter all the limited evils incident to human nature, that he may escape an infinite evil. Now if such an evil there is, it infinitely concerns us to know it.

Dech. There may be, there certainly is, a chief good and evil; but whether they are infinitely great, is a question. As the nature of man is only finite, to me it should seem, that his happiness and misery must be also finite and limited. But be that as it will, our greatest evil must be the reverse of our greatest good; and, consequently, he who knows the one cannot be ignorant of the other. Now, as our greatest good consists in the perfection, so our greatest evil must consist in the depravity, of our nature.

Shep. We have already seen, that the perfection of our nature is not our greatest good, but only the immediate means of it. It will follow therefore, if your rule of opposites is admitted, as I think indeed it ought to be, that the utmost depravity of our nature is not our greatest evil, but only the immediate means of it. The same arguments that led us to the former conclusion, must lead us to the latter also; and, therefore, I shall not repeat, but refer you to them. As the greatest happiness of man consists in the eternal enjoyment of God, and his favour; so the greatest evil, by the rules of opposites, must consist in the displeasure of Almighty God, and its effects, namely, an eternal exclusion from him, to which the extreme depravity of our nature must infallibly subject us. But by what effects, and to what degree, the displeasure of God will manifest itself to a creature thoroughly depraved, revelation only can inform us; nay, revelation only can tell us, that certain actions, to which nature prompts us with the greatest importunity, if committed, especially if often repeated, tend to the utter depravation of our nature, and, in consequence of that, to our greatest misery. This we have already proved; and it follows, that revelation only can point out to us this grand and interesting sanction of the divine law.

Dech. Your revelation tells you, that the greatest misery

of man consists in the eternal displeasure of God, and its effects, namely, confinement to a lake of fire and brimstone for ever. This sort of punishment, to be inflicted on a mere spirit, is impossible and absurd; for mere corporal inflictions cannot affect an unbodied spirit.

Shep. Although we should understand the Scriptures literally in these and such like expressions, yet no absurdity will arise from thence, if, as the same Scriptures inform us, the soul is to be reunited to the body at the resurrection. Such a union will make corporal pains and torments as possible to us then, as they are now. But, however, as among the expressions, by which the miseries of the damned are set forth to us in Scripture, there are some that cannot well be taken literally, such as concerning the worm that dieth not, by which are to be understood the everlasting reproaches of a guilty conscience; so the rest are probably, in a great measure, figurative, and used to convey the strongest and most affecting idea possible, to minds accustomed to sensible notions, of the future miseries to be suffered by the reprobate.

Dech. It may be so; but, surely, that revelation could never have come from God, which represents him as unjust and cruel, as punishing to all eternity, with the most frightful tortures, the transgressions of his poor frail creatures. And if the justice of God, which cannot punish finite offences with infinite and endless misery, makes the belief of such a punishment absurd and blasphemous; his mercy, which is also infinite, must make it still more so. If there were nothing else to prove a revelation false, that pretends to come from God, but its recommending to our belief such notions of his severity, as represent him unjust and cruel, that alone would do it effectually. David, it seems, had other notions of God; for he asks, 'Shall thy jealousy burn like fire for ever?' We may be sure, the true and natural answer is, No. When God shall have punished his disobedient creatures in proportion to their offences, justice being then satisfied, mercy will at length take place; and surely a temporal punishment, especially if it is long and great, may be equal to the most enormous offences of men.

Shep. That which happens in respect to the punishments annexed to God's law, happens also in respect to

the penalties of human laws. He who is threatened with death for robbery or murder, thinks what he is to suffer too grievous, and wishes it were lighter. But the lawgivers, magistrates, and subjects, whose safety lies in the great severity of his punishment, think otherwise. He also who, knowing himself guilty, is threatened by religion with eternal vengeance, wishes God would only correct him, and then make him infinitely happy; that is, that he would no otherwise punish him for the greatest enormities, but by rendering his nature more perfect, in which he places the chief happiness of man; in order to which, if some medicinal sufferings are necessary, although he cannot clearly see how, he does not think it altogether unjust in God to lay them on him. These fond wishes of his deceitful heart he works up into a sort of arguments for a universal purgatory, and strengthens them all he can with others as fallacious and groundless, drawn from the supposed insignificancy of his sins, from God's indifference as to all a finite creature can do, from the justice of God, confounded with, and lost in, his infinite mercy, and the like. These arguments help to make him easy when he reflects on his former transgressions, and afford him more licence and latitude as to his future conduct. Thus man deals by himself, as soon as he is persuaded he hath a right to be his own lawgiver. But the just and good God, who does not give every man a law peculiar to himself, and calculated for his present pleasure, and private conveniency, consulting the general good of all his creatures, gives one law to all, and proportions its sanctions to the infinite importance of its ends, rather than to the degree of virtue or vice in the agent, considered as of greater or less importance to the good or evil of this world; for if the motives to virtue were only equivalent to the inducements to vice, the will must be suspended. Freely as you would wish the moral agent to think and act, you would nevertheless, it is hoped, allow the legislator to make the encouragements to virtue greater than the temptations to vice. You would not desire any king to make his enemy as powerful among his subjects, as himself. But whether you desire it or not, God hath not done it, will not do it, in his kingdom. No, he favours

virtue, he discourages vice. Do you impute partiality to him for so doing?

Dech. This charges injustice upon God.

Shep. By no means. If happiness, infinite in duration, is promised to a being, who by his best actions can never deserve it, in case he shall approve himself by the law of God; there is no injustice done him, if he is also threatened with a punishment, infinite in duration, upon his disobedience, although by his worst actions he should not be able to bring on others a degree of misery equal to that he is to suffer for so doing. In this I suppose him an intelligent being, and endued with a perfect freedom of choice. If such a being shall, through a wilful course of wickedness, pursue an infinite evil, rather than an infinite good, who is to blame for what shall follow? Surely himself only. If the temptations to sin are but equally balanced by the sanctions of the law, that law can never sufficiently enforce virtue, as being of too little weight to sink the scale, in which virtue is placed. That there is a strict proportion between crimes, and the temptations that prevail on us to commit those crimes, is manifest; because it always requires a greater degree of temptation to produce a greater crime, than it does to produce a less. For instance, the same degree of temptation that makes a man a thief, would not induce him to commit murder, to which his nature hath a greater reluctance. If then our crimes and temptations are proportionable to each other, and if it is necessary that the detriments to wickedness should exceed the inducements, it will follow, that those detriments must also exceed our crimes; for how otherwise can those crimes be prevented? If the pleasure a man finds in doing evil is equal to the pain he is to endure, he hath an equivalent for his sufferings, and is neither a gainer nor a loser by his guilt. But it is not he alone who is to be considered in this matter. The good of the whole, in which he makes but a part, is to be provided for, and secured; but by such methods indeed as shall not break in upon his moral freedom of choice, that is, by rewards and punishments of the greatest importance, answerable to the happiness of God's universal kingdom, of which they are the securities. When

such rewards and punishments are beforehand proposed to free and rational beings, and they choose, notwithstanding, to transgress; what else is this than despising the rewards, and choosing the punishments? Now if men are capable of such a conduct, and I appeal to fact and experience, whether they are or not; surely the sanctions, although infinite, are not too great. What then is to be done with such delinquents? If, in spite of all the malignancy and perversity of their nature, they can be turned to excellent account in God's kingdom, what hinders, but that this should be done? They will not obey; let them therefore contribute to the eternal obedience of others, by the eternal example of their own sufferings. God, in no instance, shews his tenderness for the good, or his concern for virtue, more effectually, than in this severity to the wicked. He knows, that the heart of man is partial to itself, and wicked; and therefore, in tenderness to other men, leaves it not to dictate a loose and indulgent law to itself, but gives it a plain rule of duty, and enforces that rule with eternal rewards and punishments. By acting thus, he gives a higher demonstration of his goodness to all men, than could be shewn in a less interesting law; for surely, sir, you must own, in respect to the punishments annexed to his law, that you, and others, are better defended against any designs I might be tempted to form upon your life or fortune, if I am fully persuaded I shall be punished with eternal torments for such designs, than you could be, if I believed I should only undergo such temporal sufferings for them, as must at length terminate in the reformation and perfection of my nature, and settle peace between God and me. God also, by threatening me with eternal punishments for sin, shews infinite goodness to me in particular, because he furnishes me with the strongest argument for a good life, he puts into my own hands the most powerful instrument to perfect my own nature with, and consequently, in so doing, affords me the most efficacious means of my own happiness. You, sir, insist, that the infinite greatness of the rewards and punishments annexed to the Christian law is too compulsory; but every day's experience may teach you, sir, that they are by no means too great for the end, that they com-

pel nobody, and prove of too little force with the generality of men.

Dech. But you yourself have often maintained, that if they were firmly believed in by all men, they would inevitably make all men good. This, I think, proves them compulsory.

Shep. Mankind, however, are at liberty to believe in them, or not; for, as they are not set directly before our eyes, but only proved to our reason by arguments, we have it in our power to turn away our minds from those arguments, and give them up to such as tend to induce a contrary persuasion. Men find it but too easy to tutor themselves to certain soothing persuasions, and choose such opinions as they please, especially men who think for themselves, and place self in an indulgence of their desires and pleasures. But it does not follow, that if the arguments for infinite rewards and punishments were such as must convince all men, and make them all amenable to the Divine law, they would therefore make slaves of all men. If we suppose judgment already past, and the wicked, in the sight of angels and men, sent away to a place of endless torment; those who, having seen this sight, are admitted to the joys of heaven, are still free, as to their future conduct, and have a natural power to do good or evil. And if they shall be free, who have seen so evidently the fearful punishment of sin, and feel so sensibly the sweets of virtue, we must suppose mankind to be still more at liberty, or perhaps, I should say, more disposed, to transgress; who, though in this life they have the firmest faith in future rewards and punishments, yet are surrounded with innumerable weaknesses, and violent temptations, to counterbalance the influence of their faith. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, are mankind free to choose good or evil, when they are set before them?

Dech. If they appear to be what they really are, we cannot help rejecting the one, and choosing the other; for no man can choose evil, as evil, nor reject good, as good.

Shep. In respect then to the choice of good or evil, whether greater or less, no man is free.

Dech. But we may mistake the one for the other, or the

degrees of either; and so are not necessarily determined in our choice.

Shep. At that rate, then, our freedom of choice arises entirely from our ignorance. But if we are necessarily determined to the choice of good, and the rejection of evil, then we have, in that respect, no liberty; and, consequently, the setting our greatest good and evil before our eyes, cannot deprive us of liberty, because they cannot take from us that which we never had. If, on the other hand, we are at liberty to choose either good or evil, and this should seem necessary to make us accountable agents, to make us rewardable or punishable, or, at least, to prevent our resolving all sin into the sin of ignorance; our liberty cannot be infringed, nor injustice done us, by placing good and evil before us, and making us sensible of the difference, in order to a prudent choice. And as dealing thus with us, in respect to lower degrees of good and evil, can in no sense be a hardship or grievance to us, so neither can we suppose ourselves aggrieved in having infinite happiness and misery placed within our reach, and thoroughly laid open to us, since we are at liberty to choose which we will.

Dech. But as God might make the misery less, if he pleased, we cannot suppose he would make it infinite; since such is the ignorance and frailty of man, that he may possibly choose it under some mask, or appearance of good.

Shep. Here you, who make the natural light so strong as to be able always to point out to every man the distinction between good and evil, at least between the greatest good, and the greatest evil, will not allow it sufficient, when assisted by revelation, to determine our choice between infinite happiness and misery.

Dech. Between the happiness and misery you speak of, sir, the light of nature enables us to make no distinction, because it points out no such happiness and misery to us. And as to what your revelation says on that subject, you must excuse me, if I do not believe it, till I have better reasons for so doing than I see at present.

Shep. The reasons for believing in revelation have, I find, in respect to you, been but too long insisted on already, although we have as yet but touched on those reasons, any farther, than as we have endeavoured to induce

the necessity of a revelation from the utter insufficiency of the natural light. But as to the present question, whether the eternity of future punishments can reflect at all on the justice of God, I believe it may be easily cleared up. If your prince, sir, should bid you choose, whether you would enjoy a very plentiful and honourable employment under him, during the rest of your life; or be confined, till the day of your death, in a most loathsome dungeon; would you think he dealt unjustly by you?

Dech. No, sir, provided my prince had any right to confine me to a dungeon.

Shep. If he gave you such a choice, and you choose the dungeon, it would be you yourself that confined you, and not he. God proposes heaven and hell to the choice of a rational and free being; if that being should choose the latter, what injustice is done him? For his folly, and his wickedness, he observes what he is to endure; and therefore hath no sort of reason to complain. Besides, as no merit of his could have entitled him to the joys of heaven, the happiness proposed to him is matter of bounty; and, consequently, as there is great and undeserved goodness shewn him in the one case, and the strictest justice in the other, he hath all the reason in the world thankfully to close with the terms proposed to him in our religion by Almighty God. I believe there is no man on earth who, in any other case, would not be extremely pleased with the proposal of a considerable good, and an equal evil, provided he were perfectly at liberty to choose which he pleased. He could not, in such a case, avoid reasoning thus with himself: 'This proposal puts me in a much better condition, than I was in before, because I have it now in my power to add greatly to my happiness; and although I may, by a wrong choice, make myself miserable, yet, as I am free, the just apprehension I have of the evil, only strengthens my motives to the choice of the good; and if the desire of good were not sufficient to fix my choice, my fear and dread of evil could not fail to do it.' But supposing mankind had no eternal happiness proposed to them at all, but only eternal misery threatened, in case they should transgress the laws of God, I cannot by any means see how it could be thought unjust. Those laws of society, that are purely penal, are never on

that account deemed unjust, because the general good of the community requires such laws; and all who are subject to them, are able to obey them, and consequently deserve what they suffer, if they are punished for transgressing them. Now all laws are, or ought to be, proportioned to the ends proposed by them; and as the ends proposed by the laws of a great society are of more importance than those of a less, so the penalties annexed to those laws in a great society ought to be of greater importance and cogency, than those of a small one. It is for this reason that the head of a family cannot punish with death, nor that of a commonwealth with damnation. This last sort of punishment alone is adequate to the great ends of God's universal kingdom, and to the infinite majesty and justice of its Governor. We are told in Scripture, that many angels, highly dignified, and infinitely happy in heaven, have rebelled against God; and we see thousands of men every day here on earth, who shew a contempt for all laws human and divine. What a precedent would it be for God's other intelligent creatures, who are yet in their duty, to see these delinquents escape unpunished! And should they be only given over to wholesome severities, and such as according to Tindal and you, are for their good, the laws of God must, in that case, lose one half of the force and dignity necessary to the ends proposed by them. Angels and men behold what is doing here on earth, and mark the ways and measures of divine justice, from whence they draw the motives of their own obedience. When this world shall be called to judgment, the whole host of heaven will be present; and having beheld the infinite goodness of God demonstrated to the just in eternal happiness, and the horrible example made of the evil in their everlasting misery, will carry away from that great event such motives to duty, as may be sufficient to preserve them therein for ever. Besides, we have no reason to imagine, that the divine economy will not make a farther use of the wicked, after judgment shall be passed upon them. There are probably places and stations in various parts of the universe, where devils and diabolical men may be employed to excellent purpose, at the same time that they are tormented, in carrying on, although against their wills, the designs of Providence. We may rationally enough suppose a kind of

mines for the malefactors of God's kingdom to work in, where they may labour, in the quality of slaves, for the benefit of better beings, whom they hate and envy. As the happy, from motives of love and gratitude, will in the midst of their eternal hallelujahs, be active in the service of their gracious Master; so it is agreeable to the analogy of things to believe, that the miserable, as a part of their punishment, will, in the midst of their blasphemies, be forced to concur with the schemes of God, and, contrary to their nature and intentions, be employed in doing good. As the calls for these services, and the necessity of an example, arising from the punishment of wicked beings, may be eternal, so their duration in this state of servitude and misery may likewise be eternal. Be this as it will, there is yet another strong and natural reason for the eternal misery of the wicked, which seems to make it unavoidable. Evil habits, long indulged, become natural, and make reformation impossible. Were, however, a cure for such inveterate and rooted maladies of the soul attempted, it must be by such expressive and lasting severities, as no patience could endure, and such therefore, as must be attended with a deep and obstinate despair, out of which nothing but blasphemy and defiance against God could arise; that is, out of which only greater depravity, and more enormous guilt, could be produced. If the hardened offender is to continue for ever wicked, he must of consequence continue for ever miserable. We may, upon the whole I think, judge how necessary the belief of eternal punishments is to our living good lives, by this; that all men, in proportion as they hanker more or less after forbidden objects, or unlawful pleasures, labour with more or less earnestness and art to persuade themselves, that the punishment of sin will not be eternal; and that all men, generally speaking, actually lead better or worse lives in proportion as they entertain stronger or weaker fears of what is to come. Now that principle, which is so necessary to the good behaviour of every private person, and of consequence to the public good, cannot, as we took occasion to observe before, be a false or groundless principle, since God would never have so constituted the world, as to make the good of all mankind to depend almost absolutely on a falsehood, a religious falsehood.

Dech. Give me leave also to make my observation on the whole of what was said concerning infinite punishments and rewards. The greatest villain will be good, if you offer him a sufficient bribe, and threaten him with a sufficient penalty, in case he continues to act like a villain; I mean, he will act as if he were good, although his real principles will be still the same. This I am sure of; to threaten us with eternal punishments, and to allure us with infinite rewards, in order to make us virtuous, can never answer the end, because true virtue can never spring from selfishness or fear; neither is this method at all suited to the nature of free and rational beings. To frighten them into their duty by the dread of fire and brimstone, is to destroy their freedom: and to entice them to be virtuous by the promise of eternal crowns and kingdoms, is to deal with them as children, not on the footing of reason, but desire. Now true virtue can never be founded on any thing else, but freedom and reason.

Temp. You forget, sir, that Mr. Shepherd endeavoured, and I think, not altogether unsuccessfully, to shew that the reason and freedom of man are made the basis of the Christian virtues, notwithstanding the application of infinite rewards and punishments. He made these sanctions of the divine law necessary in the first step towards virtue, and provided a higher principle, namely, the love of God, to take up the mind, already disciplined by these sanctions to some sense of duty, and exalt it to the highest pitch of goodness. What you said on this subject, Mr. Shepherd, affected me not a little; but I am still at a loss to conceive the transition from the lower motives to the higher, and how it is, the selfish dread of misery, and desire of happiness, serve to inspire us with the love of God. Could you be a little more explicit and demonstrative on this point, it would be of singular use to the cause you are defending; for although selfishness cannot be, by its own nature, the very basis of virtue, yet if it is necessary, and preparatory to a nobler principle, this will sufficiently recommend it.

Shep. If Mr. Dechaine is under any mistake in the present dispute, it proceeds from hence, that he forms too high an idea of the generosity and dignity of human nature in its present condition; and, in consequence of that idea, concludes, that man may, and ought to be, won to virtue by the

mere love of abstract virtue alone. But our knowledge of mankind will not suffer us to draw this conclusion. The first hold, by which the mind is to be seized, is the desire of happiness, and the dread of misery. To these, all parents, tutors, masters, and governors, are forced to apply by effectual rewards and punishments, under the discipline of which after the mind of a young person hath for some time been formed, it acquires by experiment an approbation of virtue, and dislike of vice; the first of which is ripened into love, and the latter into detestation, by habit. Hence the froward and disingenuous boy is improved into a man of humanity and honour. In like manner the soul, under the influence of religion, being at first awakened by desire and fear, is reclaimed to an abstinence from vice, and an endeavour to be virtuous. Soon after this short initiation, it begins to taste the sweets of virtue, which it had never done, had it continued vicious. Now its relish for virtue arises, not so much from an abstract love thereof, as from an experimental proof of its good effects, already felt in part, and hoped for in a much fuller measure from the favour and approbation of Almighty God. It is not long after these first-fruits, till a larger harvest is reaped; for the soul, being now disentangled from the trammels of vice, from impure imaginations, from gross and sensual pleasures, breathes upward in the clearer air of religion, and, mounting on meditation and devotion, as on the wings of an angel, visits the springs of divine love, from whence creating goodness, and redeeming mercy, pour upon it in full streams of pleasure, infinitely more transporting, than all that the eye can see, or the ear can hear. To perfect and confirm the soul in this most happy disposition, the Spirit of God infuses into it his heavenly consolations, and fills it with the love of God. Then the soul, instead of the fears and agonies of mind, felt in the commencement of its spiritual birth, feels unutterable touches of hope and joy. Then flows its tears, from a high sense of love and gratitude, faster than formerly from the deep sense of its sins. In this manner, Mr. Templeton, 'do fear and trembling work out the salvation,' and, in due time, produce the happiness of a true Christian.

Temp. This process hath, I own, something very natural in it, and gives us a beautiful idea of Christianity.

Dech. It savours much of cant and enthusiasm; and gives, after all, but a mercenary foundation to virtue.

Shep. You do not consider, sir, what the eternal reward proposed by the Christian religion is: it is the enjoyment of God for ever, and which cannot be obtained without loving God for his own sake, and for his infinite goodness to us. The love of God is the noblest principle, and the happiness of pleasing him the most exalted motive, by which the actions of an intelligent being can be influenced. And as to the dread of eternal misery, if it is a low motive to the doing of some actions, and to the abstaining from others, it is the better fitted to low minds, and therefore, at worst rational. If there is a mind that cannot be won by all the infinite goodness, and mercy, and long-suffering patience of God, why should not such a mind have somewhat to fear, proportionable to the baseness and malignity, to the unconquerable ingratitude, and the immovable insensibility, of its nature? Do you think, Mr. Templeton, that, upon the footing of justice, he who hath done incomparably more mischief, than good, in the world, ought to have a lot assigned him, in which his sufferings shall be as nothing, and his felicity unspeakable?

Temp. Reason and justice will never allow it.

Shep. Supposing a wicked man punished with the most exquisite torments, during the longest conceivable series of ages, if he were at length to exchange his miseries for the joys of heaven, as his sufferings would bear no proportion to his enjoyments, so the whole of his lot could no way quadrate with his demerits; besides, his expectation of deliverance could not fail considerably to abate the severity of his torments, insomuch that those torments could neither by himself, nor others, be looked on as a punishment, but only a short and salutary purgation, in order to an eternity of happiness. As such a discipline must be a great encouragement to wickedness, I cannot help thinking, a base and ill-disposed mind ought to have something farther to fear.

Temp. I really think it ought; and I own you have said enough to clear the justice of Almighty God from any imputation on account of eternal punishments: but I think you have been far from reconciling the doctrine to his mercy. After ages spent in misery, and a thorough example having

been made of the wicked, if their reformation becomes, as you think it will, impossible, I believe God will greatly mitigate their tortures, or reduce them to nothing. There is something within one, that is infinitely shocked at the thoughts of eternal torments, and seems to tell us, a good and compassionate God will some time or other put an end to the miseries of the damned.

Shep. That within you, which seems to tell you so, may be sin; which fearing for the past, and earnestly desiring more latitude for the future, than religion will allow, pleads powerfully with reason, for the soothing hope of a final deliverance from misery.

Temp. That is not the case in me; for I am shocked at the thoughts of another's being eternally miserable, when my own hopes of happiness are at the highest. I have often supposed myself in heaven, and, even then, have found, that the eternal miseries of my fellow-creatures would greatly damp my joys, and fill me with pity and pain; nay, I have carried my supposition farther, and represented the man I abhorred most, on account of his enormous crimes in general, and his cruel treatment of myself, as confined to eternal flames; and I found I could not bear the thoughts of it. If now, I, who am merciful and compassionate, perhaps, in a lower degree than many other men, could thus be affected with the mere supposition of my greatest enemies being eternally tormented; how much more tender must we suppose an infinitely merciful God to be, in relation to the sufferings of his own unhappy creatures!

Dech. And when you consider, Templeton, that those creatures never sinned, but through the mere infirmity of that nature God had given them; and, even when they did sin, never considered themselves as acting against the authority of Almighty God, never intended, in their worst actions, any the least insult on him, or his laws, but only the gratification of their own depraved appetites and passions; this will make your reasoning against the belief of eternal torments still the stronger.

Temp. It does, indeed, add considerably to their force.

Shep. You proceeded, in your way of arguing with yourself, Mr. Templeton, entirely on suppositions. You first supposed your own apprehensions of eternal misery to be

entirely out of the question, and yet you cannot tell but they might have still been at the bottom of all your reasonings on this subject; the mind is apt to deceive itself, when it believes it is only thinking impartially for others. Again, you supposed yourself in heaven, and perceived that, even there, you could not help being concerned for the eternal miseries of the damned; but all the time of this supposition you were only on earth, and subject to some small apprehensions, probably, for yourself. You cannot, at present, tell how you will stand affected, when in heaven, towards the contemners of virtue, and eternal happiness; towards the wilful corrupters of themselves, towards the oppressors of mankind, towards such as choose to serve the devil, and herd with him and his horrible associates for ever, towards the enemies of God, and the opposers of his glory and human happiness. As to what you have said, Mr. Dechaine, to encourage Mr. Templeton in his way of thinking about eternal punishments, it will, I believe, appear to have little in it, when it comes to be closely considered. God did not give us a sinful nature: nothing, surely, could reflect more impiously on his goodness, than to suppose he did. Our first parents corrupted themselves and us, and, to counterbalance our original corruption, which we were not accessary to ourselves, God hath given us a religion, and a portion of his Holy Spirit, sufficient to reinstate us in that capacity of obeying him, from which our first parents, by their transgression, fell: and, even when we neglect to apply these means, and thereby are led into a vicious course of life; if we repent, and return to the use of those means, he hath provided an atonement for our offences in the death, and a method of reconciliation with him through the intercession, of our blessed Redeemer. Again, it by no means follows, that, because mankind do not, in their bad actions, intend to insult God, and violate his laws, they therefore are not actually guilty of both: they know his will; they also believe he will judge them hereafter, and, if they have done what he commanded, reward them with eternal happiness; or, if they have transgressed his laws, that he will punish them with eternal misery. He who knows, or firmly believes, these things, and yet wilfully chooses vice instead of virtue, evil instead of good,

and perseveres in that monstrous choice, as long as he lives, is a despiser of God, his laws, and all the happiness he can bestow, or misery he can inflict. Nay, he all along believes God will look upon him as such, and knows he commits all his evil deeds in the very presence and sight of God; yet he goes on; and you, to excuse him from rebellion and insult, say he acts thus in obedience to his depraved appetites and passions. But what is there more in that apology, than to say, he regards the gratification of his own wicked and abominable will, more than the dictates of conscience, more than the promises of a gracious, and the threatenings of a just and all-powerful God? This fond excuse, which corrupt nature would make for itself, is refuted, and the relief it therein seeks from the terrors of future justice is prevented, by what happens in this world every day, and before our eyes; for men, who are moved by the corruption of their nature, and without a direct intention to insult Almighty God, being guilty of drunkenness and lewdness, such is the appointment of God in the natural constitution of things, suffer poverty, sickness, and untimely death, as the mere effect of their crimes. He who breaks the laws of his country, does not do it merely to insult the supreme magistrate, and shew his contempt for those laws; yet, nevertheless, he does actually despise the one, and insult the other. I really believe, Mr. Templeton, you earnestly desire to know the truth, and are open to conviction on religious subjects.

Temp. There is nothing in this life I desire so ardently.

Shep. In order to that most excellent end, you will, I believe, give me an ingenuous answer to the question I am going to ask you.

Temp. I certainly will.

Shep. Do not you find yourself more inclinable to the gratification of a criminal desire, in proportion as you are, at any time, less apprehensive of an eternal punishment for so doing?

Temp. I must own, I do.

Shep. When you consider the infinite mercy of God apart from his justice, and look on the punishments, annexed to his law, to be only temporary; do you not perceive yourself, as it were, untied, and more prone to sin, than when

you consider God as infinitely just, and his punishments as infinitely terrible?

Temp. I owe too much to truth, to deny it.

Shep. Such a mind as yours can hardly fail to find out the truth, and lead you to happiness. May I ask you one question more?

Temp. With the greatest freedom; and I will answer you, as if there were a window in my breast, through which you might see whether I spoke the real truth.

Shep. Was there not a time when you were more fully persuaded, than you have been of late, that the punishments of sin will be eternal?

Temp. When I was very young, I made no question of the matter; but for these six or seven years past I have either doubted, or wholly disbelieved, the thing.

Shep. Did you not stand more in awe, and were you not more afraid of doing a wicked action, under the influence of your former persuasion, than under that of the latter?

Temp. I should but impose on myself, and resist the truth, if I did not own I was. Since I began, in my own imagination, to set bounds to the punishment of sin, I have (God forgive me!) set little or no bounds to my pleasures, many of which were, I am afraid, highly prejudicial to the souls of others, as well as my own.

Shep. It is evident, then, that the belief of eternal punishments is necessary to a good life; and, if it is necessary to such an end, I say again, it cannot be vain or groundless.

Temp. To this argument, drawn from within myself, I can make no reply; yet I am still shocked at the seeming inconsistence between the infinite mercy of God, and the eternity of future torments.

Shep. Let this shock be changed into an utter abhorrence of sin, and a deep apprehension of God's displeasure, and it will deliver you from the wicked course of life into which, it seems, the want of it hath unhappily betrayed you. As the devil could quote Scripture, in an attempt upon the human nature of Christ; so he artfully argues with you in favour of vice, from your just and respectful idea of God's infinite mercy. But the sins you have fallen into, in consequence of his arguments, and in obedience to your own

natural corruptions, shew, evidently, that he argued deceitfully from good principles.

Cunn. That way of talking, about the devil, is idle, and superstitious: I hope the devil hath never argued with Mr. Templeton at all.

Shep. If you, sir, will not suffer us to ascribe vice and wickedness to the suggestions of the devil, we must either ascribe it to nature, notwithstanding your defence of all her dictates, or to some emissaries of the devil, that have been tampering with one of the fairest and most virtuous minds I ever had the happiness to be acquainted with.

Cunn. Your hint, sir, is most shockingly rude, but, at the same time, most contemptible, because it is perfectly insignificant.

Shep. I hope it is not altogether insignificant to him for whose use I intended it. If he makes a right application of it, I assure you, sir, I am in little pain how your conscience, or that of any body else, shall apply it.

Temp. Mr. Cunningham, you have yourself given occasion to this severe inuendo: however, I cannot help admiring and loving the zealous frankness of Mr. Shepherd, who is not hindered, by forms and decorums, from speaking his mind, when he thinks his duty, and the recovery of a poor soul from bad principles, and wicked courses, call upon him for openness and resolution.

Shep. I hope God will take me out of the world, before a false complaisance, or even stronger worldly considerations, shall render me deaf to such a call. But as you, sir, who know Mr. Cunningham better than I do, have thought my inuendo too severe; I beg his pardon for it, and hope he will not again provoke the too great warmth of my temper, by calling what I say idle and superstitious, at least till he hath first proved it to be so. Let him, moreover, consider, that he who is ready to apply a general reflection to himself, makes above one half of the censure.

Dech. And pray, doctor, remember, that he who, through a mistaken zeal, commits hostilities in the defence of God's cause, when milder methods would be both more becoming, and more effectual; does but give vent to his own pride and spleen, and betray the cause he pretends to serve.

Temp. Oh! Mr. Shepherd hath corrected himself; and

this unhandsome sort of chat only serves to suspend our useful inquiries.

PRAY, Mr. Shepherd, have you any farther objections to the deistical creed?

Shep. I have two very material objections to it, scarcely touched on yet.

Temp. What are those?

Shep. I think the Deists talk too boldly, and, if they do not know a great deal more of the Divine nature, than either the light of their own nature, or revelation, can inform us, very absurdly, concerning God, when they tell us he is obliged to obey the laws of nature, and that those laws are eternal and indispensable.

Dech. The law of nature is no other than the law of reason; and reason, truly such, always distinguishes right from wrong, and obliges all good and rational beings to choose that which is right. Now as God is the best, and most rational, of all beings, he must be more influenced, by reason, than any other being. He does that which is right, because it is right; and, were it not right, antecedently to his will, it could not be the object of his choice. The right or wrong of actions and things does not depend on mere will and arbitrariness, I mean, does not depend on even the will of God, but on the nature and fitness of circumstances and things, which is certainly eternal, and unalterable; so that which is good, could never have been evil; and what is evil, could never have been good. It is a contradiction to God's own nature, either to do that which is evil, or to turn evil into good, or good into evil. To do good, and avoid evil, must have been the divine rule of action from all eternity; and, consequently, as that rule must have been eternal, so must it, also, have been indispensable: he who says the contrary, speaks blasphemy. For nothing, surely, can be more derogatory to Almighty God, than either to say he can do wrong, or that he can change the nature of right and wrong, and destroy the distinction between them. If, then, the rule of right reason is that which God himself acts by, in all things, it must, of consequence, be the rule of action to all his rational creatures unless we may suppose, that God would, on any occasion, make it the duty of a rational crea-

ture to do that which is wrong; that is, to act by a rule contrary to his own. Why do we say God is infinitely wise, good, and just; but because he always does that which is most wise, most good, and most just? And why do we call him a most wise and equitable ruler, but because he requires no other rule of action to be observed by his rational creatures, than that which he always observes himself? God will never do that which is wrong, nor will he ever desire any of his creatures to do that which he himself would not do, were he in the place and circumstances of that creature.

Shep. You say, sir, I think, that God, and all other rational beings, are, on all occasions, obliged to do that which is right, and abstain from that which is wrong?

Dech. I do.

Shep. And do the right and wrong of actions depend on the nature and fitness of things?

Dech. They do.

Shep. You mean, I suppose, by things, when you speak of the fitnesses of things, such things as have been fitted to one another; and not such things as are no way relative.

Dech. Yes, sir.

Shep. Had not all relative beings once a beginning?

Dech. No doubt, they had.

Shep. Their fitnesses, therefore, must have been older than themselves; or, otherwise, the law, or rule of action, resulting from those fitnesses, could not have been eternal.

Dech. The fit and unfit of things existed in the Divine mind from all eternity, and therefore are eternal.

Shep. The law, then, does not result from the things, or their nature and fitness; but the things, and their fitness, from the law.

Dech. How is that?

Shep. Why, you say the law of fitness is eternal, and the nature of things, temporary; therefore the law was before the things; and consequently, could not have resulted from them.

Dech. It is true, I do say so; but I mean, in saying this, that God framed all things according to the plan or archetype of things existing in his own mind from all eternity: so that the eternal law of reason gave birth to all the forms

and relations of things. This, however, does not hinder the law of human duty to result from the fitnesses of things.

Shep. If things, then, had been made otherwise than they are, other duties, than those which at present bind us, must have resulted from thence; and this would make the nature of right and wrong interchangeable.

Dech. Things are wisely made, and God could not have made them otherwise.

Shep. Was God necessarily determined to the work of creation? Or was that work matter of choice and free-will?

Dech. It was matter of choice.

Shep. Was he tied down to the present forms or relations of things? Or could he have given other forms and relations to things, if he had pleased?

Dech. He could have produced things in no other forms, nor with any other relations, than such as were wise, good, and fit.

Shep. But as he is under no necessities of any kind, nor compulsions, he could have found out, and bestowed on the materials of this world, other forms and relations; and all of them as wise, as good, and as fit, as the present. You speak of a plan and archetype of things existing in his mind from all eternity; did he contrive that plan himself? Or was it a necessarily existing part of the Divine nature coeval with his being and attributes?

Dech. It existed for ever in his foreknowledge.

Shep. He could not, then, have chosen to abstain from the work of creation, or to have created any other thing, or otherwise than as it is.

Dech. This would make him a necessary agent, both as to the substances and forms of all things.

Shep. So I think. The truth is, sir, when you speak of God, if you do not confine yourself to such assertions, in relation to him, as are necessary to your own occasions, and, consequently, capable of being known, and cleared up, by reason; but give into bold speculations, above the capacity of man; you cannot help running into the most unfathomable mysteries, to call them by no harder name. God, Mr. Dechaine, made all things as he pleased: he ordered and constituted, according to his own will and pleasure, the whole frame of things, immaterial and corporeal; and it is

therefore we say, he shewed infinite wisdom and goodness in the creation. For how can we call him wise, or good, for making any thing which he could not have abstained from making, or made otherwise than he did? The nature and fitness, the forms and relations of things, which were not yet in being, did not determine the will of God, but resulted entirely from thence; and out of those, again, resulted a fitness and unfitness in actions.

Dech. But the wisdom of God determined his will; for something there must have been, to determine it; or else it acted by mere accident and chance. God must have had some reason and design in making things as they are.

Shep. Let us not, when we speak of God, presume to say, this attribute is prior in its operation to, and determines that: to talk after this manner, is to talk like vain and ignorant men. We only know, that the works of God are wise and good; but to assert, with assurance, that he made them by an eternal plan and archetype, or that one power in God dictated what another executed, is to speak presumptuously, if not absurdly. God raised the whole spiritual and material world out of nothing; what plan could there have been for the creating of something out of nothing, or for the giving being to matter by a single act of the divine will? Who can explain this inconceivable mystery, or tell us how spirit could produce matter? If God made every thing as he pleased, and fitted the several constituent parts of each system to one another, so as to render the whole of his works both beautiful and good; and if the various species of things, with all their qualities and relations, were dictated to him by no necessities of the things themselves, nor of fate, nor of his own nature; it will follow, that wisdom and choice presided over all the works of creation, and that God gave this sort of being, and manner of being, to one thing, and that sort to another, when he could, instead of that, have left the whole present system of created being uncreated, and raised another, wholly different, out of nothing; or for ever abstained, if he pleased, from the work of creation. But having once, by his free-will and choice, made all things, and fitted them wisely to one another; a natural law did necessarily result from the nature and fitness of things; and it became the duty of every intelligent being,

as soon as it knew the Creator and Governor of the world, and the fitness of things, to regulate its actions according to that law. By this it appears, that the law resulting from the fitnesses of things, and those, again from the free-will of God, and at a certain time; the law itself could not have been eternal, but must have commenced with the birth of those things to which it is a law. It is also plain, from the same principles, that this law, which sprung entirely from the free-will and choice of God, could not have bound the actions of God himself, nor been indispensable. While things remain as they are, all intelligent creatures are obliged to act according to the known fitnesses of things, unless when God requires the contrary; in which case, the superior fitness of obeying him supersedes the inferior fitnesses of actions to other things. Now although God chooses to govern the world by the nature impressed on it, and the law arising from thence; yet, as that law is no law to him, but only to his creatures, he may dispense with it when he pleases.

Dech. Will he ever dispense with this law, but for good and weighty reasons?

Shep. Never.

Dech. The law of reason, then, is a law to him; for still he acts by reason, and that reason can arise from nothing else than the fitnesses of things; and the good of the whole system of things; which, in some cases, may require a suspension of the law, in respect to lower and narrower fitnesses.

Shep. But as he created all things, so he also created the reasons of things; and can, not only annihilate or change the things; but also dispense with, or change, the reasons of things. It is not by the superior virtue of one clause in the law of nature, that he can dispense with another of inferior expediency and obligation, but by his superiority over all things, and all law; by which he hath an unlimited and uncontrollable right to dispense with the whole law.

Dech. This represents him as an arbitrary being; and if this way of thinking about God is admitted, 'we cannot tell how often he may change his law upon us: for, if he can dispense with the reasons of things, there is nothing left to

render his proceeding steady, uniform, and good; and then what a miserable condition must the world be in! since an arbitrary will might change every moment.'* No, Mr. Shepherd, God cannot act against the reason and nature of things in any case.

Shep. Say, rather, he will not; for God is both naturally and morally free; and, in acting by reason, chooses to do so; being thereunto compelled by no necessity nor obligation, but such as he is, at any time, pleased to enter into with his creatures: and his having an uncontrollable right to do whatsoever he pleases, is by no means an argument, that he will be either fickle or tyrannical. Men, indeed, are not to be trusted with unlimited freedom and power, because men are weak and wicked: but a man is not to 'imagine that God is such a one as himself.' He is invariably good and wise, and always does that which is best; not because he is obliged, by any law, to do it, or accountable to any other being for what he does; but because he is good, and always freely chooses to do that which is good. Any other idea of his goodness would represent it as involuntary, and subject his will to some superior power; whereas there is nothing above the will of God, nothing to govern that will, which is a law to all things. Shaftsbury and Tindal often insist, that if the will of God were not bounded by the law of nature, he might, without reason, change his will, on all occasions: but in this there is not the least shadow of a consequence, nor do they even attempt to assign the reason for saying so: a will may be steady that is uncontrolled, and even the wills of men are not controlled by laws for any other reason, but because they are variable, or ill-disposed. All men allow, that laws are given for the bad, and not for the good; and as there is no man perfectly good, so there is no man left entirely to himself, and without some law or other: but as God is perfectly good, so he is also perfectly free, and bounded in his actions by no law at all.

Dech. Does a law take away freedom from him who is obliged to obey it?

Shep. He is still at liberty to obey or disobey, but cannot do the latter without forfeiting the rewards, and incurring the penalties, annexed to the law, which renders him

* Chr. as Old as the Creation.

subject, and, consequently, not perfectly free. Besides, he is not perfectly free, who hath any superior; and all laws are imposed by some superior, on some one or more inferiors; and therefore God can be subject to no law, because he hath no superior. There is not one ingredient in a law that does not prove, to demonstration, the impossibility of any law to bind the actions of God. Every law is dictated by some higher power to him or them who are to obey it; but there is no higher power to dictate to Almighty God. Every law is given to teach those, who are obliged to observe it, how they are to act; but God is infinitely wise, and cannot be taught any thing. Every law hath a penalty or reward, or both, annexed to it, which are to be conferred, or inflicted, on those to whom it is given; but God can neither be rewarded, nor punished. Every law renders those, who are subject to it, accountable to some superior; but God is accountable to none, nor can he be judged by any. Every law necessarily supposes those, on whom it is laid, to be fallible and peccable; but God is infallible, impeccable, and absolutely perfect. Thus, sir, it is manifest, beyond all contradiction or question, that the actions of God are bounded by no law: yet all his creatures are perfectly safe, and may, if they please, be happy in his hands; for he is infinitely wise and good; and, having it in his power to do what he pleases, will do only that which is good.

Dech. His wisdom and goodness, then, are laws to him; and that is all I ever insisted on, though in other words.

Shep. Say, rather, his wisdom and goodness are to him, what his laws are to us.

Dech. When I say that reason, or wisdom and goodness, are laws to God; I do not mean, that they are laws, in the strict and immediate sense of the word, as used among men.

Shep. Yet you Deists, and many others, without ever defining your meaning for the word, use it as familiarly, when speaking of God's actions, as you do when you speak of your own, or those of other men; by which you bring yourselves, and others, to talk of God as a limited being, as subject either to some eternal superior, or to himself; as bound, obliged, and governed; which are most derogatory expressions, and highly absurd in themselves, as well as dangerous

in their consequences, and repugnant to truth and religion. Great errors in all sorts of knowledge, arise from the abuse of words; and, among all the misapplications of words; none hath been more general than that of the word law: it hath been raised infinitely above all sense and signification by some, in order to apply it to God; and by others, impiously applied to him in its own proper and natural sense. It hath been also sunk, although not quite so far, beneath its rational or possible import, by a metaphorical application to the qualities of matter, and the causes of mere physical phenomena. Attraction, or gravitation, is called a law; and the properties of motion, with the mechanical powers, are all enacted into laws, by natural philosophers. The heavenly bodies are all carried about by due course of law; the ebbing and flowing of the tides, and even the most irregular motions of the winds, are perfectly legal: no wonder, when such liberties as these are taken with the word, if the more regular dictates of human nature are by many, and its most vicious propensities by some, called laws, before any authority appears to establish and enforce them as such. To conclude, the reason of man, when duly informed, can be a law only to man; and to say that reason, of any sort, can be, in any sense or propriety, a law to God, who lays his laws on us, and not on himself, seems to me to be nonsense, if not blasphemy: and, in my opinion, this way of expressing ourselves ought to be abstained from, inasmuch as it leads us into unfathomable depths and difficulties, which may be avoided by more guarded expressions, that will serve all our purposes as well; such as, that God, being infinitely wise, good, and just, will always choose to act right, without being bound so to do by any law. To say that this law, laid on man, is eternal, is the same as to say, that human nature, to which alone it can be a law, is eternal. And to say that God himself cannot dispense with it, is to say, God is subject to the laws he hath imposed on his creatures, and destitute of that prerogative which all earthly legislators claim to themselves.

The other objection, which, I think, bears very hard upon the deistical creed, is this: If we suppose the law of

nature, as set forth in that creed, and in the writings of our Deists, to be the only rule of action given us by Almighty God, and the only law by which we are hereafter to be judged; if we likewise suppose this law is so fully promulgated to every man, by his own sentiments and reason, as to leave him without excuse for any ignorance of his duty, into which he may happen to fall; and enforced, proportionably, to its great and important ends, by some future rewards and punishments, sufficiently inducing or alarming; and if, lastly, we suppose this law to be absolutely indispensable; the condition of mankind must be most forlorn and frightful.

Dech. Pray, sir, how so?

Shep. Don't you say the law of nature is sufficiently made known to all men?

Dech. I say, every man hath sufficient means of knowing, by the light of nature, what is his duty, on all occasions.[a]

Shep. You say this law is perfect, and neither needs nor admits of any alteration, addition, or diminution.

Dech. I do.

Shep. Are all men to be judged by this law, whensoever God shall please to call them to an account?

Dech. They are.

Shep. If any man shall be found, on trial before the judgment-seat of God, to have been a strict observer of this law, he will, I suppose, be acquitted, and remain, for ever afterward, in the favour of God.

Dech. He will.

Shep. But if he shall be found to have been a transgressor of this law, will he not be condemned?

Dech. So I think.

Shep. Have not all men transgressed this law?

Dech. They have.

Shep. All men, therefore, shall be condemned.

Dech. As no man can live up to the strictness of a perfect law, God, who is infinitely merciful, will not expect a perfect obedience. The law or rule of action must be perfect; but it does not follow from thence, that a perfect obedience

[a] Christ. Old as Creat. chap. 1, and elsewhere.

shall be required, with rigour, from frail man, by a gracious God.

Shep. You suppose, then, that God will forgive the breaches of this law.

Dech. Look you sir, I do not suppose he will forgive a total or enormous violation of it.

Shep. That is, if a man hath not violated every single article of it, he will be forgiven.

Dech. Neither is that what I mean; but if a man hath not been guilty of the most atrocious breaches, and hath done more good than evil in the whole of his life, taken together; God will reward him according to his overplus of good.

Shep. It seems, then, man can merit in the sight of God, or deserve somewhat of God.

Dech. I think he may; and Christians think so too, or they would not always call eternal happiness a reward.

Shep. The Papists, indeed, say a man may, in some sense, merit of God; but the Scriptures say the contrary, and bid us look upon ourselves, when we have done our best, as 'unprofitable servants.' Those eternal joys, therefore, which are proposed in Scripture as an encouragement to virtue, are, in that sense, called rewards; not that our best actions can deserve them, but because the infinite goodness of God is pleased freely to bestow them on us for Christ's sake, if we do our utmost to live according to the Christian covenant. Christ imputes his merit to us, and it is on the strength of that, and not of our own merit, that we are said to be rewarded. But the Deists, who make virtue its own sufficient reward, are fully paid, perhaps over-paid, for all the good they do, in this life: however, I cannot but tremble for the fate of man, when I consider, that his sins, I mean the sins of the best man, appear so plainly to exceed his good actions; when I consider likewise, that man having received all he hath, and particularly his power of doing good, from God, owes him the utmost good he can do; and therefore, in his best actions, does but pay a small part of his debt, not place an obligation on God; and in his bad actions, which are in your opinion committed wilfully, and against the well-known law of God, gives great and grievous cause of offence to his just Maker and Judge. Lucretius had good reason to object to the Pagan, that is, as you and Lord Her-

bert call it, the natural theology, that it afforded no hope of forgiveness after sinning.

> ——At mens sibi conscia facti,
> Præmetuens adhibet stimulos, terretque flagellis ;
> Nec videt interea, qui terminus esse malorum
> Possit, nec qui sit pœnarum denique finis ;
> Atque eadem metuit magis hæc ne in morte gravescant.

Dech. Fear not. Man is in the hands of a merciful God, and may safely trust to his goodness.

Shep. It is a most pleasing thought. But, lest man should presume on this goodness, and be thereby encouraged to become evil himself, it is, I should think, highly necessary he should consider God, not only as merciful, but as just also, and capable of inflicting punishments, as well as dispensing rewards. If the subjects know they are to be forgiven, the penalties of the law are of no effect. But if, in any case, the delinquent cannot be both pardoned and punished, or if it should seem doubtful whether a just and merciful God should exact justice, or confer mercy, I must own I think it most consistent with the wisdom, nay, with the goodness of God, that justice should be preferred; because, on the due distribution of justice, the order and happiness of the whole depend : whereas, the good of individuals only can result from the pardon of individuals. Justice, timely executed on some, may prevent the sins of many; but mercy, shewn publicly to all, can hardly fail of encouraging all to transgress, should they be tempted to it.

Dech. They must take care, therefore, not to proceed to such enormity and hardness; as mercy, bounded by justice, cannot forgive.

Shep. There are, then, certain lengths to which they may carry their transgressions, with hopes of impunity.

Dech. There certainly are sins which a man may be forgiven; and others, for which he will be punished. There are greater and lesser sins.

Shep. Sins, considered in themselves and their effects, are of different degrees; however, if they be considered as done against the authority of God, they must deserve his animadversion. God, if we believe the Deists, is neither the better nor the worse for what we do, is infinitely happy without our obedience, and in spite of our vices; and is no way

affected by our actions.[a] It must be therefore your opinion, that all our actions are equal in the sight of God, that is, equally insignificant, and incapable of pleasing or offending him, which totally destroys all practical religion.

Dech. This opinion, even as you misrepresent it, is more to his honour, than that principle of Christians, which represents all our sins as highly and equally offensive to him. He, you know, who transgresses one commandment, is by your religion said to be guilty of the whole law.

Shep. But a man may transgress the whole law more heinously in one instance than in another. In any instance, however, he who transgresses the law, sins against infinite Majesty, and is very guilty. Now this is by far a more wholesome position, than that God is utterly unconcerned about our actions. Perhaps a man is not disposed from within, nor tempted from without, to commit murder; but, however, is covetous, and defrauds his neighbour. This man shews no respect for the majesty of God, and the authority of his law; and were he as strongly tempted to commit murder, I cannot see what there is to restrain him. He certainly is lawless, and does all the mischief he hath an inclination to; which to God, who sees his heart, renders him as guilty as if he had actually broken all his other commandments.

Dech. You may refine upon this matter as you please; but nothing can be more manifest, than that some sins, being more prejudicial to mankind than others, and done in violation of stronger and higher reluctances, planted in our nature by God, are therefore in his sight more offensive.

Shep. And what will follow, but that the greater shall be punished with more severity, and the smaller with less? In the laws of God, as well as man, there are different degrees of punishment; yet the smallest and mildest is still a punishment. I would be glad to know, however, what degrees of vice they are, into which a man may give with impunity, and where he ought to stop; this being the only point of importance to accountable and punishable creatures, inasmuch as the venial degrees of sin, in respect to punishment, are as no sins at all. Does the light of nature, with the

[a] Chr. Old as Creat. chap. 5.

clearness of all its other dictates, inform us of this? Does the law itself tell us what part of it we may safely transgress; that is, what part of it is useless and insignificant?

Dech. That would be a strange absurdity in a perfect law. If we transgress, sir, we are then at the mercy of God, to which we are to set no bounds.

Shep. Not unless he hath told us what bounds he intends to set to his own mercy; and I only inquired whether this had been done through the light of nature or not. Since I find it is not, and that we have by that light no hope of mercy, if we transgress the law, but such as is defeated by an utter ignorance, whether we are within the pardonable degree of sin or not; as I also find, that all we have to expect from a perfect obedience to the law of nature, is a bare acquittal, be so good as to tell us, on what dictate of nature you found your expectation of a future reward. Tindal, I know, gives it as his dictate, that we can by no means merit in the sight of God.[b]

Dech. Reason tells us God is infinitely bountiful; and it is on that divine attribute we found our hopes of happiness.

Shep. If a man makes a present of a considerable sum to one he never received any service from, can that be called a reward?

Dech. No.

Shep. The future happiness you expect, then, cannot be in the nature of a reward. God is not obliged by your law to make you eternally happy, although you should conform yourselves ever so strictly to it; or if he is, let us hear what assurance you have from nature of this obligation lying upon God.

Dech. We know that a good being is pleasing in his sight; and that whosoever is so, must be happy.

Shep. Then our goodness gives him pleasure, contrary to what you all maintain concerning the insignificance of our actions in the sight of God. Your law, in short, strips you of all pretensions; and as you all transgress it, renders you liable, for ought I can see, to all the effects of God's displeasure, be those what they will. I cannot find in the

[b] Chr. Old as Creat. chap. 5.

light of nature, as it shines from Shaftsbury, Tildal, or you, the least glimmering prospect of reconciliation with God.

Dech. Tell me, doctor, if a man should offend you, and, repenting of what he had done, should acknowledge his fault, and ask pardon; would you not forgive him?

Shep. Yes; or I should act against the express commandment of Christ.

Dech. Very well; and do you not believe Christ to be God?

Shep. I do.

Dech. Do you believe God would command you, who are a frail passionate creature, as poor Cunningham, the devil's emissary, can witness, to do that which he himself, who is infinitely patient and forgiving, would not do?

Shep. I believe, were it possible for him to be in my place, he would do what he hath commanded me to do.

Dech. Why, do you really think his place makes forgiveness less proper than yours does?

Shep. In many cases it certainly does. I commit many offences against him, and my neighbour; and cannot reasonably hope to be forgiven myself, if I do not forgive others. But he is without sin; and besides, as he is supreme monarch of the whole universe, it belongs to him to see justice done, 'to render to every man according to his deeds,' in order to support the dignity of his laws, on which the happiness of all the free and intelligent creation depends; and which, if any one might transgress with impunity, on merely repenting, I cannot see how his kingdom, at least this earthly province of it, could be preserved. Every one will repent some time or other, if he thinks he is to be pardoned, and thereby exempted from intolerable punishments; by which means it will come to pass, that no one shall suffer, and so the penal laws of God will be in vain, although the world shall be filled with wickedness, and by no temptation so much as by this very expectation of impunity on the repentance deferred as long as the delinquent pleases.

Dech. That is as much as to say there is no room for pardon, and consequently no encouragement to repentance; and that God, though he hath ordered every one to forgive, will himself never forgive any one. This, I think, is shocking.

Shep. So it is indeed; and I never said any thing like it. At present I want to know whether the law of nature promises pardon for sin; whether for all sins, or only for some; and, if some only, what those sins are, and whether absolutely, or on certain conditions; and, if the latter, what those conditions are. These, if I be not mistaken, are points well worth inquiring after.

Dech. Why then I tell you, God will pardon no sins, great nor small, if not repented of; because while a man perseveres in sin, he is incapable of receiving the favours of God. On the other hand, God will forgive all sins truly repented of, because the true penitent is an object of his pity. Can any thing be more evident, than that, if doing evil is the only foundation of God's displeasure; ceasing to do evil, and doing the contrary, must take away God's displeasure?

Shep. The true penitent, I believe, is an object of God's mercy; but, as one who hath offended, and is debtor to the law of God, he is still an object of his justice too; and to prevent the law, on which the general good depends, from falling into contempt, he must be punished. Besides, God's assistance is necessary to a true repentance. Before a sinner can begin to be the object of God's favour, he must cease to be what he was before, and commence a new man. Now no man can make a man. None but the Creator can make a new man, or a new creature. There is a degree of strength necessary to a true repentance, such as no man is master of. But, as I said a little while ago, that the case of God and any particular Christian was, in respect to forgiveness, widely different; so you have this moment acknowledged it, and made it wider than I ever took it to be.

Dech. Have I, sir?

Shep. Did you not just now say, that God will pardon no sins, but such as are truly repented of? And yet you have been very lately arguing with me upon a supposition that God requires it of man, that he should forgive all sorts of sins, without any limitation.

Dech. You Christians say he does, and I only reasoned with you on your own professed principles.

Shep. But pray what is your own way of thinking in this

matter? Doth the law of nature bid us forgive those who make no submission nor reparation?

Dech. I believe it does.

Shep. Believe! Are you not clear in a point of such moment, which the conversation and dealing of almost every day make it necessary for us to understand?

Dech. Upon second thoughts, it certainly does.

Temp. Beyond all question; or else the Christian religion, which bids us love those who hate us, and pray for those who persecute us, would be a religion of vastly more tenderness, than that of nature; and Christian charity would be highly preferable to philosophical benevolence.

Dech. I hope nobody thinks it was to avoid that preference, that I said the law of nature obliges us to forgive our enemies, without acknowledgment or reparation of the injuries they have done us.

Shep. We are bound to believe, sir, you have discovered this useful truth on the spot. Were it not so, or had you known it before, you could not have hesitated a moment for an answer. But nature is sometimes like a flint, and will not emit its light without a little force. But if the law of nature bids us forgive unrepented offences; and if that law be not only the voice of God speaking in us, but the very law that binds the actions of God himself, surely then God will forgive us all our offences against him without repentance.

Temp. Upon my word, Mr. Dechaine, the parson hath fairly thrown your own principles and arguments back upon yourself.

Dech. I do not see any thing in this piece of sophistry that affects the law of nature. As none of our offences can reach or injure God, so, were he to consider himself only, he would forgive all the breaches of his laws; but, as he is the conservator of society, of justice, and good order, according to your own doctrine, and according to that of Dr. Tindal in his third chapter, he will not forgive an offender, till he is reformed, and becomes fit for the society of rational and good beings.

Shep. Let me understand you. If an offence should be committed against God alone, does it for that reason contain nothing of immoral or criminal in it?

Dech. By no means, or it could not be properly said to be forgiven; but as it could not provoke God to anger, nor any way dishonour or injure him, we may be sure he would forgive it.

Shep. If the offender should persevere for ever in blaspheming and hating God, and, for supposition's sake, should carry well enough towards mankind; would God pass by all, suffer him to be for ever happy in heaven, and join his blasphemies with the concert of hymns, poured out by the blessed spirits to their benefactor?

Dech. Your questions are sometimes very shocking.

Shep. Well, let us quit this perplexing topic. I insist, however, that although God should never punish on his own account, yet if he does it for the sake of the general good, and merely as the conservator of justice and order, it amounts to the same thing exactly, as to the point in hand; and I am still at a loss to conceive, how mere repentance, which at best can only render us the objects of pity, but make no sort of amends for the evil we have committed, should hinder us from being still the objects of justice notwithstanding.

Dech. Can the same man be both an object of mercy and justice at the same time?

Shep. O most easily, sir. A judge often thinks the case of a criminal, whom he pities, highly deserving of punishment.

Dech. But a judge acts for another, and must punish; whereas God acts for himself, and may pardon.

Shep. Surely you forget. God, as the Judge and Governor of the world, acts for the good of all his subjects; and although 'his mercy is over all his works,' yet his justice also presides as extensively over his whole universal empire. God can, and would, always forgive, were it not that his wisdom and justice, taking place, as well as his mercy, make the punishment of particulars conducive to the general good. Any inferior judge, though he pities the criminal, he in justice is obliged to condemn, would in most cases, condemn him, were he to act for himself; because, were he to make the contrary the rule of his practice, he would, as far as his jurisdiction extended, totally destroy the effect of law, and ruin the community, were he supreme.

Dech. Well; but reason tells me, that God, who is infinitely gracious, will accept of repentance as an atonement, and not destroy his creature, after he is reformed, and disposed to do good.

Shep. Those are very arbitrary assertions; and my copy of the law of nature hath a various reading here, that makes me doubt of the certainty and clearness of yours, which, I am afraid, you at least take the liberty of a commentator with. Mere repentance can make no satisfaction to justice for injuries and offences past; it can only put a man in the way of his duty for the time to come, which he owes to God, and which, therefore, can clear no scores for him. As to the reformation of a transgressor, together with his disposition to lead a new life for the time to come, it may be rendered very precarious by the supposed easiness of obtaining pardon. Nay, it cannot be effected without the grace of God, which the light of nature gives no hope of, and which all light-of-nature men make a jest of: and, as the grace of God is the free gift of God, man can neither offer up it, nor its fruits, as an atonement for his sins. Man, sir, is frail, and, in hopes of being pardoned again, may again transgress, unless his reason tells him he cannot be forgiven a second or a third offence. Pray, what does reason say in that case?

Dech. It gives him hopes of forgiveness, if he sins and repents ten thousand times.

Shep. Nay, that he will sin so often I will venture to assure him, unless he dies very young. But, whether he will repent so often, or ever sincerely and finally, or not, ere the terrors of death are set before him, is a great question, having from nature no sufficient incitements to so irksome a duty. Our Deists have no where proved, or, as far as I have read, attempted to prove, from the light of nature, that the mercy of God can take place upon a penitent offender, while his justice stands neuter, or lies dormant, and suffers the wrongs done to his subjects to go unpunished, to the great encouragement of wickedness. Although he, who murders a man, repents, and, for the time to come, carefully avoids the least approach to such an action, yet, in his latter behaviour, he only does what it was always his duty to do, and no more; but makes no atonement to his poor neighbour,

whom he hath deprived of life; nor to the community, from which he hath cut away a member; nor to God, whose creature and image he hath defaced. The Deists can never shew, on their principles, that the murderer, or any other criminal, can make the least atonement or reparation for either the offences he commits against God, or the wrongs he does to man, in cases where restitution is out of the question. They say the observation of the natural law alone can render men acceptable in the sight of God; and propose it as the only rule by which they are to act, and, consequently, to be judged. It is by this that, according to the deistical hypothesis, all men must stand issue before Almighty God, and be acquitted for the observation, or condemned for the transgression of it. Now I must appeal to experience, and to the heart and conscience of every man, whether he does not live in the daily transgression, be it in higher or lower instances of those laws, which he believes God requires the observation of at his hands; and whether, after the most sincere repentance, and the most thorough reformation he can make of his life and conduct, he finds not enough of evil dispositions and lapses to lament in himself, and put him in mind, that he is one of those debtors, who, having nothing to pay in towards former accounts, is still adding to, and inflaming, the debt. Thus, I think, it appears pretty plainly, that if all men have sufficient means of knowing their duty, as you insist they have; and if every man transgresses the rules of his duty, as his conscience cannot but inform him he does; the whole race of mankind are lost for ever.

Temp. You, Mr. Dechaine, seem to forget, that God is just; and you, Mr. Shepherd, that he is merciful.

Dech. I insist, that, as God is merciful, he will forgive.

Shep. And I insist, that, as he is just, he will punish.

Temp. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, are you able, upon the deistical scheme, to rid yourself of this difficulty?

Dech. I see no difficulty in it at all. God gives us laws only for our good, and will never suffer those laws to become a snare to us, and the occasion of our eternal misery. Besides, he is infinitely compassionate and indulgent to the frailties of his creatures; and, as they will not always con-

tinue to offend, so neither will he always persevere in punishing.

Temp. God, it is true, gives us laws only for our good; but those laws cannot be for our good, if he does not punish us for the violation of them, and that in a degree equal to the end and purpose of those laws, that is, I must own, in a very high degree of severity.

Dech. Can it be for our good to be punished so severely?

Temp. It is certainly for the good of men in general, and of all intelligent beings, that the laws of God, on which all order and happiness necessarily depend, should be duly enforced; and this they can never be, at least among men, if the punishment, annexed to the transgression of them, is inadequate to the end, or may be evaded by repeated repentances, after repeated sins; which is but trifling with the laws, and the majesty of their author. You own yourself, he who transgresses the law of nature is without excuse, since that law is sufficiently made known to him, and placed even within his own heart. This makes wilful offenders of us all, and justifies our judge in laying on us all those severities, whatever they are, which he hath annexed to the transgression of his law, and made fully known to us, as a main and necessary enforcement of that law. Whether sinful men will ever cease to sin, if they do not stand in awe of such severities, or whether they will ever give up their sinful, but long indulged delights, if they are not encouraged so to do by better grounded hopes of pardon, than the mere light of nature can give them, I much question. In this life I am confident they will not, and to repent in the next life may, for ought nature can tell us, be too late. Pray, Mr. Shepherd, can you solve the difficulty before us, upon Christian principles?

Shep. Does not the difficulty consist in this, that infinite mercy will forgive all sorts of sins, and infinite justice will suffer no sin to go unpunished?

Temp. It does.

Shep. If man suffers the full punishment of the law, justice only operates, and mercy does not interpose. If man is exempted from the punishment of the law, then mercy only is consulted with, and justice is laid aside. But, on the

Christian scheme, justice is satisfied, by the death of Christ, and so mercy takes place. The sins of all men are fully punished in his sufferings, the curse of the law is taken off, and the string of death is broken.

Dech. The sufferings of one cannot atone for the sins of another, nor would justice punish the innocent for the guilty.

Shep. God hath a right to accept of this as an atonement, and justice did not lay the punishment of our sins on Christ, till Christ voluntarily undertook to endure the punishment due by the law to our transgressions.

Dech. As men cannot be made miserable by the sins of other men, so neither can one man be made happy by the virtue and sufferings of another. To say that they may, is to speak against reason, and the common notions of justice. Now a religion, the fundamental article of which contradicts the common sense of mankind, can never be received by mankind, as the dictates of Almighty God, till mankind have lost their senses.

Shep. That, I find, may be contrary to common sense, which is confirmed by universal experience. The son every where suffers for the sins of his father, in hereditary poverty and sickness. To deny the fact, is to deprive yourself of a right to be disputed with; and to say it is inconsistent with the justice of God, is to run into Atheism or blasphemy. Estates are often and justly settled on the posterity of a person who died in the service of his country, and they enjoy the benefit of their patent, without any merit of their own, while unattainted of high treason, merely for the merit of their ancestor. This legal imputation of merit, or application of the fruits arising from the merit of another, is never deemed unjust among men. Even when the reward is pecuniary, and arises out of the public funds, those, who are taxed for these funds, never grudge the bounty paid out of their own pockets, to the descendants of such as have sacrificed their lives for the good of the community. In this channel, estates, annuities, and honours, descend to many generations; and I question much, whether any other tenure gives, in the eye of reason, so equitable a title. Thus, sir, both naturally, and politically, the intail of merit and demerit goes down, from a good or bad man, to his posterity, by a necessity nature, or a consti-

tution of state, independent of the will and previous to the behaviour of him who inherits. Now, sir, it will be impossible for you to shew that God may not do that by grace, which he hath done by nature, and which the head of every community hath a right to do by legal and civil appointment.

Dech. The imputation of merit, not one's own, does by no means furnish an argument for the pardon of crimes, on account of another's merit; yet this is the point at which your instance ought to have been levelled.

Shep. I thank you for the hint. Is the son never justly pardoned even the crime of high treason, on account of his father's services and fidelity? Can any thing be more consistent with justice, than a pardon thus obtained, provided sufficient security can be produced for the future loyalty of the son?

Temp. There is, I see, a beautiful conformity between the governmnt of God's kingdom, and that of human societies.

Shep. They ought always to be the same, so far as the diversity of circumstances, and the subordination of human governors, to the absolute prerogative of the universal governor will permit: for we must still remember, that God is vested with a higher plenitude of power to prescribe terms, on which imputed and vicarious merits may be accepted, than an earthly legislature, or king.

Cunn. I cannot see how the laying on one person the punishment due to the sins of another, can be reconciled with what God tells us by the mouth of Ezekiel; that 'the father shall not suffer for the iniquity of the son, nor the son for the iniquity of the father; but that the soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

Shep. That passage hath no reference to the case in question. The Israelites complained, that they had been punished for the sins of their forefathers; and nothing can be plainer, from a variety of passages, than that they had actually suffered severely by means of the idolatry and other sins of their ancestors and kings, which brought on them a long train of calamities; such as drought, famine, pestilence, the sword, and captivity. But God, in this passage, declares, that it shall be no longer so; and that, for the future, every

man shall suffer only for sins of his own committal. This, now, is only a particular dispensation, and contrary to another that had continued till that time; and therefore cannot, but by implication, be applied to the supposed substitution of our Saviour's sufferings, in the room of ours: nor can it, even by implication, shew that this substitution is unjust: for, whereas the Israelites complained of the sufferings before-mentioned, it appears they did not consent to them; but our Saviour, who had a right to choose either life or death, voluntarily submitted to the death of the cross in order to take away sin; he, of his own accord, became our surety; and upon our non-payment of our debt, paid it for us. He was a hostage for our performance of a covenant, and upon our transgressing the articles of that covenant, did freely undergo the penalty annexed thereunto; and having made a full atonement for our breach of the former, made a new covenant between God and us by his blood.

Cunn. Surely, if the penalty of the former covenant was eternal death, Christ did not undergo that penalty; for he suffered only a temporary death.

Shep. But if he suffered what, in the sight of his father, was equivalent, and all that he at first engaged to suffer; this must be sufficient.

Dech. If Christ was a mere creature, he could make no equivalent atonement for us; and if he was God, he could make none, because God can neither die, nor suffer.

Shep. But as his person consisted of both the divine and human nature, the one rendered him capable of suffering, and the other gave sufficient dignity to that suffering. The continual afflictions, the horrible agonies of mind and body, with the shameful and grievous death of a person consisting of God and man, was equal in the sight of an infinitely tender and affectionate father, to all the eternal sufferings which mankind were liable to for their sins. It is impossible for us to conceive that excessive anguish which could force the blood of our Saviour through his pores; and the still greater torments that could compel him, when on the cross, notwithstanding the full assurance he had of his father's eternal love for him, to cry out, 'My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?' It is manifest, from these instances, that his sufferings were not like those of other men; and

that nothing, but the intimate union of the divine nature with the human, could have upheld the latter under such an infinite extremity of anguish. This must have been a more piteous and moving sight to the eyes of an infinitely gracious and loving Father, than the eternal miseries of man, guilty and rebellious man. There is another consideration, by which the value of our Saviour's sufferings ought to be estimated. As an indignity is always rated by the presumption, and as the presumption bears an exact proportion to the meanness of the person insulting, and to the greatness of the party insulted; so, in like manner, all acts of condescension being estimated by the humility, and that again by the dignity of the condescending person, and by the lowness and demerit of the party condescended to; it will follow that the condescension of our Saviour, in taking our nature on him, and suffering therein, must have been an act of infinite condescension, if it is allowed that the dignity of his person is infinite, not only in itself, but also in respect to the unworthiness of those for whom, and the cruelty of those by whom, he suffered. His innocence and goodness, whereof the one is infinite, and the other perfect, constituting an essential part of his dignity, do particularly enhance the value of his mercy and condescension; especially when, at the same time, our guilt is considered.

Dech. Nothing, in my opinion, can be more inconsistent with reason and common sense, than to imagine any atonement can be made for sin by the sufferings of an innocent representative.

Shep. All nations of the world, then, have thought and acted in this respect, against reason and common sense: for in all nations sacrifices, and vicarious atonements, have been offered up to God; and the light of nature did not forbid the world to hope for pardon of their sins, upon taking away the life of even a beast, with that view.

Dech. It was not reason, nor nature, I am sure, that put mankind on this strange expedient.

Shep. No; nor could mankind have ever so much as thought of such an expedient, had it not been appointed by Almighty God, as a representative of the great sacrifice. But neither reason nor nature, sir, made any objections to it till mankind lost sight of the end for which vicarious sacrifices

were instituted; and then God, who himself appointed and ordained them, reproved them, as superstitious and inefficacious. Nay, the reason of mankind in general, and even of the wisest men among the heathens, was not so strong as to abolish, or so much as discountenance, the use of sacrifices, even after the rational end of their institution ceased to be known. The practice went on, and it was believed, that the gods were appeased by the savoury steam of roasted flesh.

Cunn. But how does all this discourse, about sacrifices and the natural light, shew that your faith does not ascribe injustice to God in putting an innocent person to death for the transgressions of the guilty?

Shep. Was Christ innocent?

Cunn. 'He was without sin.'

Shep. And was he put to death by the appointment and predetermination of God?

Cunn. The Jews put him to death.

Shep. Do not evade the question. Was he not the 'Lamb slain from the foundation of the world?' Was he not 'so delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, that the Jews, having taken him, by wicked hands crucified and slew him?'

Cunn. And what then?

Shep. Nothing; but that you are to answer, as well as I, for saying that God predetermined the death of this only innocent person. It now lies equally on us both to look out for a reason sufficient to justify God in sending an innocent person into the world, and fore-ordaining his death.

Cunn. He suffered persecution and death, that he might set us an example of resignation and patience.

Shep. Was this all? Or is this enough? The prophets before him, and the apostles after him, did the like; but they had been guilty of sin, and were liable to death, the wages of sin: their example, therefore, in respect to resignation only, may seem a more natural object of our imitation, than that of our Saviour; so that if to set us an example of resignation was all our Saviour died for, this might have been done as effectually, and, upon your principles, more justly, by the death of one, whose natural infirmities brought him nearer to a resemblance of ourselves. No, Mr. Cunningham; some higher view must be looked for in

our Saviour's death, some end, which the death of no mere man, no sinner, is qualified to answer; namely, that which the Scriptures so often mention, and so strongly insist on, the remission of sins. If you can conceive it just in God to consent, that his most innocent and holy Son should die the death of a malefactor, merely to set us an example of patience; how can you call it unjust, when another, and yet a much greater and better end is added; the disappointment of diabolical envy and malice, the restoration of mankind to peace with God, and the healing that horrible breach which sin has made in the moral world? If any thing can reflect on the justice of God for causing, or even suffering, his innocent Son to be put to death, it must be the want of a sufficient end or purpose. Now, in the name of wisdom and justice, was the mere setting an example of patience a sufficient end? Patience is but one, in the circle of virtues, which it is our duty to cultivate, and which, after all the influence of our Saviour's example, we may fail to exercise as we ought. And did the Son of God suffer the death of a guilty slave, merely to supply us with a precarious help towards the cultivation of our virtue, which although we should cultivate to the utmost, it would neither make us good nor happy, if the other virtues should be wanting? Surely the scheme of divine wisdom looked much farther than this; and surely every Christian must renounce the word of God, or else believe that Jesus Christ, 'the righteous, is the propitiation for our sins;' and that 'we are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ.'

Dech. This scheme tends strongly to encourage men in their sins: for if another man, or a beast, may be made to endure the punishment of our sins for us, we need be in no pain about what we do. If the law of conscience can have any effect, it must proceed from a full persuasion in the breast of every man, that he himself, and not another, is to suffer for his own offences. He cannot, I think, entertain any opinion of more dangerous consequence to morality, than that all his debts of sin are already paid; and that the fund of merit, provided for that purpose, is so infinitely great, as to make it impossible for him to exhaust it, by his utmost wickedness.

Shep. Your objection to Christianity is founded upon

your ignorance of it. Christ hath, through his blood, made a covenant between God and us, by which we are obliged to forsake our sins, and keep the commandments of God, in pain of forfeiting all the privileges, to which we are entitled by his death, and by the covenant established therein. He hath made no atonement for those who persist in their sins; but as he knows mankind are very corrupt and weak by nature, and, consequently, unable by their own strength to observe the articles of this covenant, he hath, in his holy ordinances, conveyed to us such divine assistances, as, if duly concurred with on our part, may sufficiently help our natural infirmity. As we are sinful, he hath called us to repentance, and made atonement for us; as we are weak, he hath imparted to us his own strength; and as we are, in ourselves, unworthy of eternal happiness, he hath graciously imputed his own righteousness to us. Thus hath God, in the dispensation of our religion, been pleased to deal with us; and nothing can do so much honour, either to his justice, or mercy.

Dech. Pray, sir, did the blood of Christ make a full satisfaction, to the justice of his Father, for the sins of the whole human race?

Shep. It did.

Dech. And all who repent, and believe, are to be saved through Christ?

Shep. They are.

Dech. It follows, then, that the justice of God only is taken into the Christian scheme, and his mercy left out: for if a full amends is made for our sins, we have a right to be saved, and do by no means lie at the mercy of God for our salvation.

Shep. Was it no act of mercy in God to assume our nature, and in that nature to undergo the punishment of our sins? Is it no act of mercy in God to bestow on us a saving faith, and by his grace to work in us a true repentance? Will it be no act of his mercy to accept of us, who are unworthy in ourselves, for the sake of Christ Jesus, our Redeemer?

Dech. In the defence of this amazing scheme, you can scarcely offer any other arguments, but that God had a right to execute such a scheme; and that he was pleased to do it.

Now I may use the same way of arguing, and insist that he hath a right to proceed with us in another manner, and accept of repentance, as a sufficient atonement.

Shep. We can not only prove, sir, that God had a right to choose this scheme of redemption, but, likewise, that he did actually choose, and execute it. This, I hope, we shall do, to the satisfaction of Mr. Templeton, in our future conferences; and with it prove, what is necessary to it, the divinity of our blessed Saviour. As for you, sir, and the other Deists, you cannot, surely, say, that God can forgive sins on a mere repentance; because you maintain, that he acts by the eternal law of reason and justice, and that he is as much obliged, as any man can be, to conform himself to that law. If this is the case, as governor of the world, and judge of all men, he cannot pardon a delinquent, on his bare repentance; that would be to act against the eternal fitnesses of things, and the indispensable law of nature; which, if it dictates any thing, it must be this; that the law of God is not given for nothing, nor its penalties instituted in vain; that as every offender would repent, rather than be punished, if that alone would serve the turn, the law, and its penalties, would be rendered utterly ineffectual; and that therefore impartial and universal justice must be done, in order to the preservation and happiness of that boundless and important kingdom, over which God is pleased to preside, as an equitable ruler and judge. You may combat this argument, drawn from the justice of God, and founded on your own principles, with others deduced from his mercy, as strenuously as you can; but all such arguments will only serve to involve you in endless and inextricable difficulties, from which unassisted reason can never set you free: it is the Christian scheme, alone, that can do this. What other means or expedients, beside the Christian, God might have made use of for the satisfaction of his own justice, and the manifestation of mercy to his fallen creatures, we cannot tell; neither you, nor I, nor the wisest man that ever lived, is able to form the least notion of any other method, sufficiently qualified to answer the end: all other schemes we can think of, either sink the one attribute, to give scope to the other; or, as they are both infinitely active, leave them mutually to suspend each other's operations for ever.

Dech. That is to say, the sins of men have excited a kind of struggle and combat between the attributes of God.

Shep. No, sir, it does not so much as insinuate any such thing. The wisdom of God, and the goodness of his Son, immediately upon the unhappy breach made in the kingdom of God by the sin of man, contrived the blessed means to repair it, set forth in our holy religion; by which the great difficulty is removed, and mankind taught that solution to it, which no created wisdom was ever able, of itself, to find out. The angels are said, by St. Peter, to have had a desire to look into the mystery of our redemption; but St. Paul says, it was hid in God from the beginning of the world; and that the wisdom of God, manifested therein, 'was made known to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, by the church of Christ.' The reason of man is altogether unable to fathom such depths, and, when it sets itself to inquire how the justice of God can be satisfied consistently with his infinite compassion, is lost in an endless maze of difficulties, and seeming contradictions, which it knows not how to get over. The angels themselves were, it seems, unequal to this discovery, which, now that it is laid open by revelation, even man himself can conceive.

Dech. By what I can find, this scheme of redemption, as you call it, is still a mystery, too hard for the digestion of you Christians. Many of you deny the divinity of Christ, on which you found the dignity of his atonement, as, for instance, Dr. Clarke, &c. yet maintain the doctrine of the atonement: others, who seem to be less remote from the truth, deny both: so that if mankind were, on any occasion, at a loss to know how they should be proceeded with, they are still as much in the dark as ever, Christianity affording no certain lights herein, that may be depended on.

Cunn. Christianity, rightly understood, promises forgiveness of sins, and eternal life, only to a true repentance; and those men do but deceive themselves, who are led, by their own interpretations of Scripture, to depend on foreign or imputed merit for their salvation. Christ is called our Saviour, because he set us an example, which if we follow, and gave us a law, or rule of action, which if we observe, we shall save ourselves. Nothing hath hurt Christianity so

much, and given its adversaries so great an advantage against it, as the endeavour of divines to reconcile the terms of salvation, therein proposed, to a careless and sinful life. The first step they made towards this, was by persuading themselves and others to expect forgiveness of their sins for Christ's sake, and all the blessings proposed in the gospel for his righteousness, not their own. Popery went a step farther; and, as if conscious that Christ's merits were not sufficient to excuse the sins of all mankind, nor entitle them to infinite favours, it added to it the merits of all the saints, and sold them to such as were not disposed to acquire merit by any other means than their money. This is the most dangerous article of Popery, because it strikes more directly than any other at the foundation of all morality. As this error was older than Popery itself, and as our reformers every where, except a few, considered nothing as an error, but what was purely Popish; they threw out the imputed merits of the saints, and retained that of Christ only; not reflecting, as they ought to have done, that the one is as apt to infuse expectations hurtful to real religion and virtue, as the other. To make the merits of Christ sufficiently efficacious, they taught also that Christ is God; and so clogged the reformation with the Incarnation, the Trinity, and I know not what other unintelligible mysteries. However, there were some who went farther, and gave us Christianity as its author left it.

Shep. Namely, Socinus and his followers. The church of England hath been, to the full, as guilty of this fault you find with the reformation, as any other church, nay, rather more so. She sets forth the doctrine of the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the satisfaction made for sin by the death of Christ, most expressly, in her articles; she makes a constant use of the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, in her public service; nay, she does a great deal more than all this; for she mixes those doctrines with her liturgy so essentially, that it is impossible for any body to join in prayer with her, but he must call Christ, and the Holy Ghost, God, and pray to them as such. If Christ, and the Holy Ghost, be not God, this is rank idolatry; and idolatry is a damnable sin: yet Mr. Cunningham holds two parishes by a solemn subscription to our articles; repeats our creeds

in public with an audible voice; and offers up his own, and the prayers of the whole congregation, to 'God the Son,' and 'God the Holy Ghost:' he knowingly and wilfully commits what he takes to be idolatry and a damnable sin; he encourages others, by his public example, to persist in this crime, which he represents, to his own conscience, as one of the first magnitude, and deepest dye; but then he makes amends for all this, by arguing in private against the saving merits of Christ, and the Trinity: such is the new-fashioned kind of sincerity, in which some of our modern divines, and all our Deists, make the whole of religion to consist.

Cunn. This is only railing at me, sir, and not proving the doctrine of satisfaction to be no novelty, or reproach to Christianity.

Shep. You say, sir, this error of expecting salvation through the merits of Christ, is older than Popery?

Cunn. I do.

Shep. Was it not held by one party, in the time of the Nicene council?

Cunn. It was.

Shep. And did not some, among the fathers of the first and second century, lean a little to it?

Cunn. I believe some did.

Shep. I am sure the apostles held it, or they could never have used such expressions as these: 'Ye are bought with a price. We are redeemed, not with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ. We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins. Him hath God set forth to be a propitiation for sin. Christ hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.'

Dech. We did not meet to hear you cap texts.

Shep. I have only quoted a few, out of innumerable texts that might be cited from the writings of the apostles, to shew they held the doctrine of the satisfaction; and the two last shew they believed also in that of our Saviour's divinity. He, too, sets forth the same doctrine: 'I will lay down my life for the sheep.' The same was also believed all along in the Jewish church, and gave all the merit to

their sacrifices. Isaiah believed it; for he says, 'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.' Nay, he founds his office of intercession on his satisfaction: 'He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' Job calls him 'his Redeemer;' and he is said to have been 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.' Thus, sir, your censure of this doctrine includes the church of Christ in all ages, the apostles, Christ himself, and the prophets; and although, if we believe the Scriptures, it was settled between God the Father and God the Son, at the creation of the world, and, consequently, must have been foreseen, as predetermined from all eternity; yet you are pleased to call it a novelty, and an error. What is still more extraordinary, you subscribed to this error when you was admitted into holy orders: you solemnly declared, in the face of the church, your unfeigned assent and consent to it, when you entered upon your first living; you repeated that declaration, in order to your enjoying the second; and, I presume, would do the same, after all you have now said, for a third: you daily read the Scriptures, and repeat the creeds to your people, in which it is set forth in the strongest terms; nay, and, not satisfied with all this, you profess it, as often as you perform divine service, in a hundred solemn acts of devotion, to God's own face: yet you believe it to be a novelty, an error, a reproach to Christianity, and a provocation to vice and wickedness.

Temp. Good God!

Shep. Yet you believe there is nothing required to make you acceptable, in the sight of God, but sincerity.

Temp. This scene is a little too shocking, Mr. Shepherd; pray close it.

Shep. Let wickedness hide its own head, if it can; it is my duty to tear away its cloak: complaisance is as much out of this question, as when a criminal is condemned for murder. I have already shewn, gentlemen, that Deism is utterly defective, inasmuch as it wants an atonement for sin, truly repented of. A few words will suffice, to reconcile the doctrine of such an atonement to reason, and take away

all objections to it. Our sins might be justly punished in our Saviour, since he was by no means compelled to suffer for them, but did it voluntarily. Besides, he did not suffer, either as being in himself a just, or guilty person; but as undertaking the office of our representative and sacrifice, and as one who had power of and in himself, to lay down his life, and to take it again. His Father did not, by an arbitrary act, take away his life, or he could not have reasoned as he did; 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life.' Nay, his infinite goodness discharges mankind of this guilt: 'No man taketh it from me; but I lay it down of myself.' His righteousness, also, might be rewarded in us, and no offence to reason; he might transfer it as justly, as a man can make a present of any good thing he possesses, or make over by free gift his title to an estate, to one he loves. In all this, there is nothing repugnant to reason, but somewhat perfectly agreeable to infinite goodness. If we consider the ends proposed by the sufferings of our blessed Saviour, they were most suitable to the attributes of God, to the government of the world, and to the wants of man; for they, alone, could at once satisfy the justice of God, and make us objects of his mercy; they, alone, could demonstrate to the whole intellectual world, the heinous nature of sin, and the strictness of divine justice; and yet, at the same time, preserve from total destruction a species of rational creatures. I challenge the whole world to assign a scheme, by which any of these important ends can be answered, without forgetting the rest. This now is so far from being an encouragement to sin, that nothing can so effectually deter us from it. 'If the word spoken by angels,' says St. Paul, 'was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him? If we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law, died without mercy. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath

trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?' Let no Socinian, after this, say there is little stress laid in Scripture on the blood of Christ; nor no Deist, that because Christ hath died for our sins, we may therefore be in no pain about them: for although nothing can be more sweet than the hope of forgiveness, proposed to us through the blood of Christ, yet is this a most awful comfort, a most alarming mercy. If the tenderest love can win us, or the most dreadful denunciation of justice can frighten us, to our duty, here are both in perfection; here is something to melt the thinking mind into gratitude, and something to rouse the stupid to a just concern for his ways.

Dech. Enough, to answer both purposes, is deducible from the light of nature.

Shep. Little or nothing is deducible from thence, if it does not give us a right idea of God, and our duty. Yet, although it should, if it does not give us well-grounded hopes of pardon, after transgressing his law, it will only drive us to the despair of devils, to an endless progress in sin; but if, by that light, we have hope of forgiveness, upon an unlimited repetition of sinning and repenting, that light is then a temptation and encouragement to sin, sufficient to invite over to itself, from the strictness of Christianity, not only the loose and ill-disposed, but even those who have the highest esteem for virtue.

Cunn. The application of Christ's merit, if it were granted, must be a thing of great uncertainty: for who can tell whether he is within the terms, on which it is to be expected?

Shep. The doubts arising from this uncertainty in some minds (for they do not affect all), are of unspeakable use to them; besides, it is better to have even the lowest hopes of pardon, than to be sure of condemnation, which is all can be expected from a perfect knowledge of God's will, and a continual transgression of it, without the least idea of an atonement. Pray, Mr. Cunningham, upon what terms do you expect salvation?

Cunn. Upon my own obedience to the will of God. Do you expect yours upon any other?

Shep. Besides my own obedience, which is very imperfect, I hope for salvation through the righteousness of Christ. Do you think your obedience is such as to merit heaven, when examined by the law of God, either natural, or revealed?

Cunn. If it is not, it is my own fault; for it might be such.

Shep. Then you have more to answer for than any other man; for sure I am, no other man can be good enough, if left to himself, to merit eternal glory. The Scriptures speak so very often, and so very strongly, in a contrary strain, that I think it needless to quote them. A perfect obedience is, in my mind, too little to merit heaven, as it is all due for being, and the comforts and honours annexed to that being here. But the misery of it is, no man pays, or is able to pay, a perfect obedience to the will of God; so that, upon a fair balance of temporal accounts, every man is a debtor to God. With how ill a grace, then, shall he claim a glorious crown, and an eternal kingdom, for his deserts!

Temp. For my part, I disclaim all such pretensions, and hope God will not judge me merely by my obedience, either before or after the most thorough reformation of my life I have any hopes of making.

Dech. Have you not enough of Mr. Shepherd's harangues?

Temp. I like his reasonings so well, that I am determined to hear him upon the last article of the deistical creed, which denies all revelation.

Shep. Will you be so good, then, gentlemen, as to finish what is to be done at my turret? for my duty, and my other little affairs require I should be within call.

Dech. Very scrupulous! Well, we will.

Temp. Ay, and we will go to church to-morrow; shan't we, Mr. Dechaine?

Dech. We can't tell how we shall be disposed, till to-morrow comes.

DIALOGUE V.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Dech. WHAT a weakness was it in me to be prevailed on by Templeton to go to church yesterday, where I heard what I suppose I must be obliged to hear over again to-day; a set of notions and opinions, disagreeable enough in themselves, and made still more so by a dull defence! Surely, once had been enough in all conscience for the patience of the oldest sniveler in the parish.

Shep. You need not tell us, sir, how insignificant and unentertaining all discourses on such subjects must be to a gentleman, who is not only wiser than a human teacher, but also too knowing to need any instructions even from God. Having already shewn you think so, it is now time to shew, that God thought so too, both in respect to yourself, and mankind in general, to whom nature and education may have been less liberal. The last article of your creed, which is negative, consists in the denial of all revelation; but as I own there have been many pretended revelations imposed on the credulous world, I shall only desire you to give your reasons for rejecting the Christian.

Dech. That I shall do, in order as they occur to me; and although the strongest objection against revelation arises from the universal clearness of the natural religion and law, which, with all you have said, you have not been able to disparage, and which therefore makes a revealed one utterly needless; yet, as more than enough hath been already said on that topic, under the consideration of the former articles in our creed, I shall wave it for the future, and only insist on such arguments against the revelation you speak of, as arise entirely from itself. In the first place, though I cannot, with Mr. Chubb, think it utterly impossible for any man to know whether he himself is actually inspired by God, yet I am of opinion there must be too much obscurity and uncertainty in all the methods, by which revelations are said to have been conveyed, such as dreams, visions, voices, to be relied on in an affair of sufficient importance to make a pre-

ternatural intercourse between the divine and human nature necessary. Enthusiastics, who are prompted only by a wild imagination, and persons in a frenzy, or the raving fit of a fever, are as fully satisfied of the reality of the things represented to them, and convinced of the truth and fondness of their own notions, as those are, whose senses are clear and perfect, and whose reason is in its full vigour. This considered, I am much at a loss to conceive how the prophets and apostles, as you call them, could have been so confident, which I believe they were, that God had in reality made any revelation to them; or, at least, how others can be sure he did; since those prophets and apostles have not told us by what means their conviction was wrought in them. Had this been done, we might have formed some judgment of the matter, and seen more clearly, than we can at present, whether their inspirations carried higher marks of truth and reality, that the imaginations of enthusiasts or madmen.

Shep. You cannot surely think it impossible, that God, who hath given us senses and reason, by which certain knowledge in some things is conveyed to us, may by other means communicate as certain a knowledge of other things, not perceivable by the ordinary inlets to knowledge.

Dech. This does not seem to be impossible.

Shep. But if those other means are preternatural, the person who is actually inspired by God, can never communicate to uninspired persons an adequate idea of such means, because they are destitute of all inlets to knowledge, but the natural. Hence it comes, that although some men may, by the power of God, be rightly convinced their inspirations come immediately from him, so, I mean, as clearly to distinguish them from all imaginary or enthusiastic convictions; yet they cannot make others sensible of the means by which the Divine Spirit works this conviction and distinction in themselves.

Dech. Their inspirations, therefore, can be of no use but to themselves; because they cannot prove to others, that they are inspired.

Shep. Although they cannot prove this by conveying into the minds of others a perfect idea of the very means, by which the inspiration or revelation is communicated to them, yet they can do as well; for they they can clearly prove by

miracles, that such communication hath been actually made to them; they can prove it also by the completion of events foretold. A blind man can never be made to conceive the means by which a seeing person discovers objects and distances that lie beyond the reach of his hand or staff: yet he can be easily and sufficiently convinced, that others have some sense or faculty, by which the aforenamed conceptions, so inconceivable to him, are actually performed.

Temp. It is surely very conceivable, that God may as easily convey to any one the genuine signs of divine revelation, as the thing itself.

Dech. Your conception is a good deal more pregnant than mine, who am not very ready at conceiving things I can form no idea of.

Shep. But you have no mean talent at conceiving difficulties, or impossibilities, in those very things, whereof you have no ideas.

Dech. Truth, for aught I know, may be of either side, in a question so metaphysical; and therefore we will detain ourselves no longer with it. But I am still more at a loss to imagine how the inspired person can convince another, that he is charged with a message from God. I know miracles have been much insisted on, as a sufficient means for this end. But I know, at the same time, that there are secrets in nature, by which effects may be produced, which, to persons unacquainted with those effects, may seem to be above the powers of nature. There may be also, and you Christians insist there are, spirits of an evil disposition; and yet so far superior to mankind in knowledge and power, that it is impossible for us to know what wonders they can, or cannot perform. The Jews, in Christ's time, it seems, thought so; and ascribed his miracles to the malice and power of such beings. Now if there is not some sure and certain method fixed between the worker and the spectator of a miracle, by which the former may be able to satisfy the latter, that what he does is the effect of divine power, and not of natural or supernatural magic, I cannot see how any mission may be proved to be divine by the assistance of miracles.

Shep. Does not the same natural cause always produce the same natural effects, provided it is attended with the

same circumstances, and exerted upon the same or a like subject?

Dech. It does.

Shep. These words, therefore, 'Be thou whole,' if they ever did heal the sick by their own natural virtue, must always do it, when applied to the same purpose, and under the same circumstances.

Dech. Those words have in themselves no power to heal; but an adept may convey through the air, or by some other vehicle, unknown to the ignorant, the sanative fume or quality of some powerful drug, which may work some alteration in the sick person, at the same time that the aforementioned words are uttered; and this effect, helped out by a strong enthusiastic imagination (for you know the patient always wrought one half of the cure by his own faith, as it was called), may produce a degree of health, sufficient to make a superstitious multitude imagine there is a real miracle in the thing.

Shep. It would be hard, I think, to suppose, that an inveterate lameness, or blindness, could be cured, or a person four days dead restored to life, by this method, howsoever ingenious it may appear. And it must be granted to be still as unlikely, that a man of common sense would put the proof of his mission from God on an operation so precarious, and depending so mainly upon the unknown disposition of the patient. But to let this pass; such a proceeding can be of no efficacy, when the person who is restored by it, is absent, and beyond the activity of your drug; or dead, and incapable of faith or enthusiasm. The cases of the centurion's servant, and Lazarus, were utterly beyond the power of natural causes; but we could not be sure, that they were also above the power of evil spirits, if those spirits, either before or since, had ever been able to perform such wonders. We think it impious to ascribe the incommunicable attributes of God to created beings, though of the highest dignity and goodness; and how shall we then rob him of his omnipotence, and bestow it on the worst of beings? To create, and give life, are effects of infinite power alone; and to do these with a word, that is, without instruments or means, is to assume the place and power of Almighty God, is to be God indeed. But, granting that evil spirits could by any

means give such proofs of their power, would they exert it against themselves? Would devils employ it to subvert idolatry, and the adoration of devils? Would they use it in dividing the Red Sea, in order to deliver a nation from the very sink of all idolatry, in opening the earth to swallow up the blasphemers of the true God, in clothing mount Sinai with fire and thunder, that a law enforcing virtue and goodness, might, be delivered to the Israelites with the greater pomp and authority? But I am amazed how any one can call those evil spirits, to whom he ascribes such acts of goodness, as giving life to the dead, and delivering the miserable from the most melancholy and grievous distempers, in order to establish the most exalted and purest system of piety and virtue.

Dech. This way of proving the divinity of a revelation by miracles, hath, to my apprehension, something very odd and uncouth in it. What connexion, in the nature of things, is there between a miracle, and a revelation? How can the one be inferred from the other?

Shep. That performance, which from the goodness of its tendency, and from its contrariety, or superiority, to the powers of nature, appears evidently to come from God, if accompanied with any doctrine, delivered by the performer, as the dictate of Almighty God, must prove that doctrine to be divine, especially if it is such a doctrine, as reason was of itself unable to investigate, and, now that it is delivered, is unable to prove it inconsistent either with the attributes of God, or the wants of men.

Dech. The force of this argument is by no means apparent to me; for the person who is empowered to work the miracle, and charged with a revelation, even granting both to be true in fact, is still free, as well in a moral, as a natural sense; and therefore may pervert, or change, the nature of the revelation, insomuch that he, who believes the revelation to come from God, must depend entirely on the honesty of a man as weak, as fallible, and as easily tempted to dissemble, as himself.[a]

Shep. He who sees the miracle wrought, and is convinced it is performed by the power of God, must at the same time

[a] Chubb's Farewell, sect. 8.

be fully convinced, that the searcher of hearts hath chosen out an honest person to utter his important message; or otherwise he must apprehend, that God may be deceived in the instruments he employs, and disappointed of the great ends he proposes to himself, in bestowing on an improper person the power of working miracles, and singling out an unfaithful messenger to deliver his will to mankind. God, by the miracle, assures the beholder, that whatsoever the worker delivers to him in the name of God, does actually come from God. If therefore he, who sees the miracle wrought, ascribes it to the power of God, he cannot help regarding the message delivered to him in virtue of that miracle, as the voice of God. Besides, he can hardly suppose, that a man, enabled by God to work miracles, could after such a conviction of the divine presence and power, prevaricate in a case of so great importance with so awful a master; and he can still less suppose, that, if he should once prove so impious and unfaithful, the infinitely wise and good Being would continue to him the power of working miracles to no other end, but the establishment of principles different from, or contrary to, the divine purpose. Hence it follows, that a series of miracles, truly such, wrought by any preacher, is a full and irresistible demonstration to right reason, that he is a preacher of truth and righteousness.

Temp. We must cease to think with reverence of God's truth and wisdom, before we can believe him capable of assisting an impostor with supernatural power.

Shep. Nothing can be more evident. Although, however, a real miracle is the highest proof that can be given of a divine power, and, with reasonable people, is in itself sufficient cause of conviction; yet, as our blessed Lord had a stiff-necked and unreasonable people to deal with, he wanted not other proofs to support his mission, more peculiarly adapted to the received principles and faith of the Jews. Their own prophecies proved him to be the person they expected upon the strength of those very prophecies; and besides, he told them on many occasions, the most secret thoughts of their own hearts, into which none but God himself could penetrate.

Dech. And yet, had the proofs been so very convincing as

you would make them, the Jews, to a man, must all have turned Christians.

Shep. But had they been so weak as you would represent them, few or none among the people so bigoted to their law, their traditions, and their rabbis, and so bloated and blinded with the hopes of a mere temporal deliverer, could have been converted. As to those who were not, we know full well what stood in the way of their conversion, what they suffered immediately after, for their wilful opposition to the most irresistible means of conviction, and how wonderfully they, at this day, assist the schemes of Providence, in attesting the truth of a religion they rail at with the greatest bitterness, and wish for nothing so much as the power to persecute it with the same fury and cruelty as at first.

Dech. As to what you said just now in relation to prophecies, I must observe to you, as Mr. Chubb hath done,[a] that this species of miracles is unqualified by its own nature to answer your purpose. A prophecy, before it is fulfilled, carries with it no evidence of divine original or truth, because it is yet uncertain whether it will ever be verified by the event, or not. Farther, if the prophecy is obscure in itself, it may be interpreted of various events; and therefore cannot precisely, or certainly, be deemed fulfilled by any event.

Shep. A plain or precise prophecy may gain credit, before it is fulfilled, by the more early completion of other prophecies, uttered by the same person, or by miracles, wrought for that purpose, when it was delivered. If by these means it shall once be reverenced as prophecy, it will become the concern of those, to whom it was delivered, to remember, or record it. When, in process of time, an event arrives, exactly answering to it, this proves the truth of the prophecy. But although the prophecy was in itself figurative or obscure, yet the event may so precisely tally with it, as at once to explain and verify it. A prophecy, whether plain or figurative, being thus proved to be an effect of the divine foreknowledge, must tend as strongly, as any other miracle, to serve the ends of Providence in uttering such a prophecy.

[a] Chubb's Farewell, sect. 7.

Now, if it was the end or purpose of Providence to instruct and reclaim the world by Christ Jesus, all prophecies concerning Christ, and fulfilled in him, must as effectually prove the divinity of his mission, as the miracles wrought by him; and to the Jews perhaps even more effectually, because, before our Saviour came into the world, they held the prophecies, concerning him, in the highest reverence; whereas they generally looked on his person, when he did come, with contempt, as not answerable to their worldly expectations, and of consequence regarded his miracles with proportionable disesteem. I need not observe to you, that the prophecies, delivered by Christ and his apostles, whether literal or figurative, that have in the subsequent ages been fulfilled, serve to refresh and confirm our faith, in the same manner, and almost in the same degree, as miracles, wrought in those ages, could have done.

Temp. This may be; but why should any prophecy have been obscure? If they were intended for proof and conviction, they ought, I should think, to have been most plain and intelligible.

Shep. Many reasons there may have been, known to God, but not to us, for the obscurity of certain prophecies. A prophecy of such an event, as men are neither able to prevent, nor by imposture mimic, may be plain and literal. Accordingly some, relating to our Saviour, whose power was not to be resisted, whose character was not to be assumed by another, and whose preachings, actions, and sufferings, were inimitable, had been delivered, long before he came into the world, in terms so precise and intelligible, as to leave no doubt, in unprejudiced minds, about their meaning. As to the obscurity of other prophecies, it was in all probability intended on set purpose, that nothing but the event might explain or interpret them, lest men should pervert the course of things, as Julian, in his attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, did, in order to frustrate the completion of them; or lest others, as many impostors have done, should have an opportunity of deceiving the world by assuming the characters, and thrusting themselves into the point of time or place, marked out by a too intelligible prophecy.

Temp. I must own, were miracles, such as those you

speak of, wrought, and such prophecies fulfilled, in my sight, to convince me of doctrines highly reasonable in themselves, and beneficial to the world, I should think myself obliged to resign the most opposite and rivetted opinions to them; but I am impatient to hear you prove, as much to my satisfaction, that I, who never saw any such miracles performed, nor any such prophecies fulfilled, have sufficient means of conviction at this vast distance of time; for this, as I take it, is the precise point of the controversy, where the proofs in favour of our religion labour most.

Dech. Yes, here they labour with insurmountable difficulties. To wave the business of prophecies; whatever reason any man may have for believing, that a particular doctrine comes from God, upon seeing another work a miracle in confirmation of it, he cannot prove to a third person, that it comes from God, unless he too can work a miracle for the conviction of the said person, to whom he delivers the doctrine; for, if a miracle was necessary to conviction in the first step of the tradition, it must be also necessary in the second; and so on for ever. From hence it appears, that miracles can only prove a doctrine to be divine to him or them, who were eye-witnesses of those miracles.

Temp. This seems to have great strength in it.

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, if a person, whom you knew to be an honest and clear-sighted man, should solemnly assure you he saw a dead man restored to life, what would you think of his testimony?

Dech. As I could not possibly have as strong an assurance of his honesty, clear-sightedness, and penetration, as of the great improbability of the fact, I should not believe him.

Shep. Well; it is true he might be deceived himself, or intend to impose on you. But in case ten such persons should all, at different times, confirm the same report, how would this affect you?

Dech. Whatsoever reasons I had to confide in their veracity before, this would induce me to believe them a parcel of cheats, who had agreed to impose on me.

Shep. Suppose, instead of ten, there were a hundred of them, and they no way interested to deceive you, or induce others to believe the fact.

Dech. This would greatly surprise me at least; but you

know a hundred might conspire to propagate the falsehood, as well as ten; and how could I be sure they were no way interested?

Shep. It is not so likely, that a hundred men should all be cheats and villains, as that ten should; nor is it at all probable, that so many persons, all liars and deceivers, should, during their whole lives, be staunch and true to such a confederacy. Rogues seldom fail to betray one another; and plots, in which many persons are concerned, and bound together by a common interest, are almost always discovered by some one or other, who finds a greater interest of his own in accusing the rest, than he could propose to himself by concealing the cheat, and only sharing in the common profits to be expected from it. Among so many hypocrites and impostors it is hard to suppose, that not a single one should be found, who was not faithful to the rest, and to the scheme of imposition they were carrying on, so far as to resist all temptations, and encounter all manner of calamities, rather than detect the unprofitable cheat. Judas indeed sold his Master for a sum of money; and, repenting, hanged himself for what he had done. But he made no discovery of any impositions or combinations between Christ and those on whom his miracles were performed; he did not even insinuate, that what appeared to be a miracle, was the effect of secrets, nostrums, natural causes, or legerdemain. Now, as Judas did not spare the person of his Master, we cannot imagine him capable of greater tenderness for his reputation and religion, than for his life. This transaction is a full vindication of our Saviour's miracles; shews they were real miracles, and convincing proofs, that he who wrought them came from God; and shews at the same time, as well as the money given to the soldiers, who were set to guard our Saviour's body, that bribery and corruption, as well as persecution, were employed against our religion; insomuch that it cannot be said, the disciples of Christ wanted encouragement to detect, since there was even a temptation, and that no small one to men who were so needy, to betray their Master. But in case the report made by those men should evidently appear, not only to promote no interest of theirs, I mean no temporal interest, but, on the contrary, should expose them to the greatest hardships, and bring on

them the most frightful persecutions, such as imprisonment, scourging, and death in the most hideous shapes, and tormenting circumstances; and if they should all still persist in the report, notwithstanding all this; you could no longer suspect the men of self-interested designs, or by-ends.

Dech. I should think them a set of the most unaccountable enthusiasts in the world; and enthusiasm you know, may do much.

Shep. True, it may; but we must not ascribe to it effects beyond its power. It may carry multitudes with it to certain lengths, but can oblige only a very few to persevere in it to death. Such instances as that of Vaninus are very rare, and can prove nothing, but that the men were stark-mad. But, much as it may do in matters of fancy and imagination, in those of sense its power is small, and hath never been known to influence more than one or two at a time, to believe they saw that which they did not see. That argument must be very weak, which founds itself on a supposition, that so great a number of persons, in all other respects sober and rational, should imagine they saw a dead man raised to life, when no such fact had ever been presented to their eyes. Enthusiasm, however, cannot possibly account for the testimony given by our Saviour's enemies to the truth and reality of his miracles, which they were unable to deny, and therefore ascribed them to the power of an evil spirit. The Scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis of the Jews, were men of such penetration, and that penetration was so sharply set upon our Saviour, and his miracles, that we may be sure, had it been possible to convict either the one, or the other, of imposture, they had done it. But, instead of this, all they could do was to attribute the wonders they saw performed, to a diabolical power.

Dech. We cannot be clear in this, because we have no testimony of the matter, but what the followers of Christ, who were interested, have been pleased to give us.

Shep. I think I have shewn they were interested, as strongly as men could be by worldly considerations, to stifle all accounts in favour of our Saviour's miracles, to disbelieve or deny them, as well, nay, more than those who crucified their Master. As the judicious Dr. Jenkins observes, had the apostles been conscious to themselves of

confederacy and fraud, and known that the unbelieving Jews could have brought even a feasible proof against the truth of their Master's resurrection; they would never have chosen Jerusalem, where the fact could have been best disproved, as the fittest place to assert it in; and that, immediately after the great attention given to that fact both by the Jews and Romans, and the utmost precaution to prevent the least imposture in respect to it; nor would they have so openly maintained, in the face of the Jews, the reality of such a fact, had they been conscious to themselves, that it was possible for their adversaries to refute what they said about it. No, they would either privately, like the teachers of our new light, have insinuated the falsehood to silly and new-fangled people; or they would have gone to some distance from the place where it was possible to prove them cheats and liars, and there have laboured with less control to establish the belief of the strange story they had to tell. Instead of doing either the one or the other, with a full confidence in the justice of their cause and the impossibility of shaking its credit in the least, they stood to the truth of their Master's resurrection at the very time and place it was done in, and to the face of the Jewish people, and their rulers. There never was, I believe, a more unfit occasion for a lie to make its public appearance, than at the feast of the Pentecost, when there were such numbers present, who could have shewn its falsehood; nor a better opportunity for the Jewish rulers to convict the publishers of it before their brethren, who were assembled from so many and so distant countries, to celebrate that festival, and who, they knew, must carry home with them an opinion either of its truth or falsehood. Yet in this assembly the apostles had the boldness to put the truth of Christ's resurrection to the test; and the Jews, instead of being able to deny it, seeing a most prodigious miracle wrought in confirmation of it, before that very concourse, went over to Christianity by thousands that very day. Thus the working of such miracles as the most implacable and sharp-sighted adversaries could not deny, went on, and conversion followed. But, had the rulers of the Jews actually detected any one of those miracles of imposture, they, we may be sure, had taken care to publish and spread that detection;

and, as during the first ages they and the Romans had it more in their power to preserve their accounts of these matters, than the Christians had to preserve theirs, Celsus, who wrote against the Christian religion in the second century, could have easily set up those authorities against the Christian vouchers; but he too was forced to admit the miracles, and ascribe them, as the Pharisees had done, to the power of the devil.

Dech. We have nothing remaining of that great man's performance, but what Origen, who was his adversary, and a bigot to Christianity, has thought proper to give us; and he, it is to be suspected, would not leave upon record such objections of his opponent, as might affect the seeming truth of his own religion.

Shep. We must suppose Origen took care to answer Celsus, as well as he could, at least on the main points; and, had Celsus argued from any record of a detection, such as I mentioned just now, Origen must have given up the whole matter in dispute, had he been silent on an argument of so much weight. But from the very objection of Celsus, that our Saviour's miracles were wrought by a diabolical power, it is plain he had never heard, that any of them was detected of imposture; for, had this been the case, he could not have argued against them in any other light, than as the effects of deceit and legerdemain, as mere human delusions, not as magical or diabolical wonders. Upon the whole, the enemies of Christianity were men of great understanding and power; and its abettors were in every respect the weakest people in the world. The former therefore, had it infinitely more in their power to entice some, and frighten others, either into a real or pretended detection; and, when they had accomplished their design, knew much better how to give it strong appearances, and make the memorial of it lasting. This art they tried, but made no advantage of it; and therefore were obliged to betake themselves to mere force and cruelty, in order to suppress that, which they could not refute.

Dech. It seems not a little strange to me, that the abettors of Christianity should make the ignorance of those who first established that religion an argument in its favour, since all the world must own, that such simple folks might

have been much more easily imposed on, than persons of greater knowledge and sagacity.

Shep. The ignorance of our Saviour's witnesses is with an ill grace turned into an objection against their veracity, by men, who cannot but be conscious to themselves, that in case persons of distinguished sense and ability had been employed for that purpose, the doubters and libertines of later ages would have ascribed all they said to artifice, policy, and combination. Ignorance and knowledge, it seems, although so opposite in themselves, are alike fit to disqualify those, in whom they are found, to bear witness to a religion we do not like.

Dech. Say what you will, those witnesses you speak of, were by either temporal, or spiritual considerations at least, strongly interested to vouch for your religion; and therefore their evidence must be of little weight.

Shep. This may account for their adhering privately to the religion of their Master, but could never of itself have induced them to labour in proselyting others; for that, as I have already observed, was directly against their temporal interest, and could never have been reconciled to their hopes in futurity, but by an express command from God.

Dech. When testimonies are alleged for facts, we are to weigh the improbability of the facts, against the credibility of the witnesses, before we give up our assent to either the one, or the other. If the improbability on the one side is equally balanced by the credibility on the other, there is a destruction of both, and the assent must be suspended. But, in case the arguments for the improbability appear to preponderate, then our assent must lean to the improbability in a ratio of the surplus; must be, as the superiority of the arguments to the testimonies. Now experience, and the evidence of our senses, prove to us, for instance, that the dead never revive; and that the stated laws of nature are never violated by God, nor can be by man. No testimony of men for the resurrection of one who was dead, can be so strong as this evidence of experience; and therefore the quantity of assent must be proportionable to the excess of experience over the credibility of those, who bear witness to the fact.[a]

[a] See the philosophical essays concerning human understanding, Essay 10.

Temp. I believe it will be no easy matter to answer this argument.

Shep. It was answered already, towards the close of our first conference. But, as it now comes forth in a new mathematical armour of ratios and equations, we must treat it as a new argument. However, it amounts to no more in English than this, that when reasons, or causes of assent, are brought for both sides of a question, we ought to close with the strongest, in proportion as it appears to be the strongest; and that experience, in the present question, appearing stronger than testimony, the assent ought to go along with experience.

Temp. That is all the argument contains; but it is a great deal.

Shep. Your experience, gentlemen, never furnished you with an instance of a resurrection, it is true; but neither does your experience tell you, that Christ did not rise again, after he was dead; nor that this was impossible. You have no evidence of sense against the fact; nor of reason, against the possibility of it. Judging by your experience, and past observation, you are confident 'the sun will rise to-morrow.' But no experience can make you sure of this, till it shall actually arise; 'for it implies no contradiction to say it will not arise.'[b] Neither does it imply a contradiction to say, Christ arose from the dead. If experience tells you, that dead men seldom, or never, revive; yet you cannot conclude, that no man ever did; 'for the contrary is possible.' Nay, no one thing in the world is more possible or easy, provided we ascribe the effect to a sufficient cause. That which is impossible to one agent, may be easy to another. That which a man, or nature, cannot effect, God can perform by a single act of his will. Now it is to the power of God we ascribe the resurrection of Christ; and therefore the power of the agent is sufficient. If, however, the fact, on account of its unusualness, appears improbable, it will, on account of its expediency appear, in a higher degree, probable, if duly considered. Such is the goodness and tender compassion of God, that we can hardly help concluding, he would some time or other use means to retrieve mankind from ignorance, wickedness, and misery.

[b] See the philosophical essays concerning human understanding, Essay 4. part 1.

If philosophy, and other ordinary means, were insufficient, recourse must be had to extraordinary and supernatural means, that is, to revelation; for we cannot possibly conceive any other effectual expedient for such a purpose; nor can we conceive, how the person, by whom the revelation should be made, could prove himself to be a messenger, sent from God, without working miracles. Were he vested with no higher signs of power than other men, his plainer dictates would appear to be no more, than the obvious suggestions of common sense, or, at most, of philosophy; and if he delivered any doctrines, undiscoverable by the force of reason, they would appear to be less; in either respect he could only teach in his own name, not in that of God, and consequently without authority or effect. That it is highly probable God would send us an instructor, thus qualified and empowered, and that this is not a probability, only invented by divines to serve the purposes of Christianity, appears evidently from hence, that Plato fell into the same way of thinking, long before our Saviour came into the world. He was strongly of opinion, that God would send some person, or being, into the world, who should teach mankind how they ought to serve the Supreme Being. But, had such a person appeared in Plato's time, that philosopher would, no doubt, have expected from him the signs and credentials of a divine commission, which could have been nothing else, but miracles; for without miracles the pretended messenger could have had no right to dictate to Plato, nor to assume any higher character, than that of a philosopher. If he could have done no more than an ordinary man could do, how could he have answered the expectations of our philosopher, or have appeared to come from God? Now, gentlemen, if the fact of our Saviour's resurrection appears improbable, when nothing else is considered, but the common course and nature of things, it must appear in a quite contrary light, when what I have just now alleged is candidly taken into the account; if it is, it will at least balance the arguments for the improbability of that fact, and give the vouchers for it their full force, without any deductions or subtractions on account of the argument advanced from experience. Give me leave to illustrate what I have urged by an instance,

wherein the assent is rationally given, against the current of experience, upon far less testimony, than that which supports the fact in question. A Negro hath a constant uninterrupted experience, that water is fluid, soft, and easily penetrated; yet from the repeated, disinterested testimony of northern people, who trade in Guinea, and of whose veracity he makes no question, he may have such reasons given him, as he cannot rationally resist, to believe that the water in northern countries is sometimes so hard, as to bear loaded waggons, &c. This testimony a Negro often receives, and often believes, without any farther proof than the concurrence of the reporters, who are known by him to be men of truth, and known also to have no temptation to combine, in order to impose on him in a thing of this nature. But if many or all of these reporters should, instead of gaining, lose a great deal by their report, this would help to raise his conviction still higher; or if they should suffer death, rather than give the lie to their own testimony, his dependence on their testimony would then be cleared of all doubts, and wholly overpower the arguments, drawn from experience, concerning the perpetual fluidity of water. Here is a rational conviction on testimony, against experience, without ascribing the extraordinary fact to the agency of a superior being, or rendering it at all probable by any previous proof of its expediency. Now this is so natural, and so common an instance, that I cannot but wonder at their assurance, who know it, as well as I do, and yet argue, as if the like could not or ought not, to take place, in other matters, wherein the reasons for it are much stronger.

Dech. After all you have said, it is hard to believe against experience, and a great inlet to imposture and superstition. I therefore cannot help thinking, that, if God intended we should give credit to facts so extraordinary, he would now and then exhibit, a little nearer to our view, somewhat of the like nature, that we might have an opportunity of examining into them by our own reason, and satisfying ourselves.

Shep. We are not to prescribe to God, nor to expect more evidence from him in religious matters, than we are ready to yield our assent to in things of another nature. Yet, if to grant even this your farther demand will satisfy

you, a few words will shew, that some provision may have been made for that also. If the person, who is said to have wrought miracles, is likewise said to have uttered prophecies concerning events, which nothing but the wisdom of God could have foreseen; if we are satisfied of the antiquity ascribed to these prophecies, and of the exact conformity between them and some recent events; we cannot but look on them as equivalent to miracles, nor help believing, that he, who uttered them, might have performed other things, as demonstrative of the divine power, as these are of the divine wisdom, notwithstanding that his experience furnishes him with no instances of facts against the established laws, or the common course of nature. None but God could have enabled any man to foretell the destruction of Jerusalem, the persecutions set on foot against the Christians, the rise or progress of antichrist, or the pope, nor so exactly to characterize the principles and practices of our infidel apostles. If God hath bestowed such a supernatural gift on men, he may also have communicated with it the power of working miracles. Here experience and observation shift sides a little, and fall in with the testimony in favour of miracles.

Dech. For my part, I cannot see, that these prophecies were either intelligible in themselves, or cleared up by answerable events; but, be that as it will, contrary arguments and evidences destroy each other, in proportion to their respective degrees of strength: and therefore, although a rational person should believe in your religion, as a consequence of having first believed, that miracles were wrought in proof of its divinity; yet his experience must be a considerable clog on his assent, a weighty counterbalance to the grounds of his faith, which must therefore be, in a great measure, precarious and sceptical.

Shep. This way of balancing evidences, and substracting the less from the greater, in order to proportion the assent to the overplus, ought not to be passed over without examination. As propositions, in themselves, are either true or false; so they must appear to be either true or false to the mind, before it fixes its assent. As soon as the judgment hath weighed the evidences for and against any proposition, and fully rests in the belief of that proposition, although the evidences against it were allowed all their weight in the

scrutiny; yet they are now regarded as false, and thrown entirely out of the scales. Were not this the case, how could a jury, on oath, find their neighbour guilty of murder, after a trial, in which he had produced considerable evidence for his innocence against superior evidence for his guilt? Although all good jurors make it a rule, in doubtful cases, to err on the merciful side, rather than on the contrary; it is, however, plain, in this case, that they have no doubts, arising from the evidence in favour of the prisoner, notwithstanding the strength of that evidence. It is true, indeed, that when the evidences, on both sides of any point, appear equal, there can be no assent given, with the approbation of reason. It is likewise certain, that opposite arguments, not equal, but nearly equivalent, leave a faint and feeble assent on the side where the superiority seems to lie; but if the superiority appears to be very great on one side, the assent of a rational mind closes entirely with it, believes without reserve, and, having regarded the arguments against its assent, as nothing, ceases to attend to them, or entirely forgets them; acting, in this respect, as the mathematician does, who, after he hath drawn his conclusion, rests therein, and attends no longer either to the several steps in his demonstration, or to the difficulties that had impeded those steps.

Dech. Still the testimonies produced for miracles, are but the testimonies of interested persons, and therefore are not to be set in the balance against experience.

Shep. It seems, to me impossible, that those, who saw the miracles wrought, and yet were not converted, and interested on the side of Christianity, should become vouchers for those miracles, and advocates for that religion they were wrought in proof of: but how, in the name of common sense, were the first converts interested, on the side of Christianity? Were not all their hopes in another world? And was not the strength of these hopes, and the interest founded on them, a full proof of their own conviction? Could any reasonable man, to whom they bore testimony of the miracles, have desired from them a clearer proof, that they actually saw the miracles, than their becoming sincere converts to Christianity, and, in consequence of their conversion, renouncing all their temporal interests, in order to secure an

eternal? But if the testimony of men, thus interested from the beginning on the side of Christianity, will not please you; what think you of those, who, from its bitterest enemies, were brought over, by miracles, to be its most zealous advocates? Their testimony is that of adversaries. Now of this sort Christianity is supported with not a few; among whom St. Paul appears as the most distinguished: his zeal against it required a peculiar miracle, wrought on himself, to overcome it; after which, being fully convinced of its truth and divinity, he interested himself as warmly in its defence, as he had done before in its suppression.

Dech. You will not, surely, maintain, that the speeches and epistles of St. Paul are to be reckoned among the testimonies of your adversaries, since they were all made and wrote after his conversion; unless you can prove to us, that his conversion was not sincere.

Shep. Is it to be expected, that a person, who is still an adversary to any particular cause, should speak, and write, and die, for that cause?

Dech. No; but, when he actually labours in its defence, he cannot, I think, be called its adversary.

Shep. It is true; yet if, while he was busied in a bitter opposition to that cause, he received a full conviction in its favour, whatsoever he does, or says, afterward, towards its support, upon the strength of that conviction, is certainly the testimony of a person who, in the midst of his prejudices and virulence against it, saw sufficient reasons for going over to it; at least, if this kind of testimony is not, in strictness, the testimony of an adversary, it is of the same, or superior, nature or force. It is a full evidence of conviction against the most inveterate prejudices, and the strongest aversion. I forbear to expatiate on the irresistible proof, drawn, in favour of our religion, from the conversion of St. Paul: because you, and every one, must have seen Mr. Lyttleton's letter on that subject; in which there is such ample justice done to the argument I have been urging, as cannot but equally prevent all that otherwise might have been said, on either side of the question. The candid reader of that incomparable paper, whose author can be no more suspected of a previous bias to Christianity than St. Paul him-

self, stands in need of nothing else, to make him a sincere Christian.

Temp. I see, to my great satisfaction, that the evidences for the second step of tradition may be very strong: when multitudes of eye-witnesses die, to convince one of a fact, though it may be very strange, one can hardly help believing it. But still I am somewhat at a loss to foresee how you will bring down this evidence to me, who live at such a distance from the facts, and make it even clearer than the assassination of Cæsar, as you undertook to do.

Shep. This I am ready to do, if you, or Mr. Dechaine, will be pleased to state the difficulties, that seem to break the chain of evidence, by which you know the certainty of the gospel-history is usually deduced by Christians.

Dech. Although, in favour of the gospel-history, it may be said, that those who wrote it were not interested so to do, or to defend it; yet when the church, from being persecuted, came to be loaded with rich endowments, idly conferred by our bigoted ancestors on a set of men who pretended to divine assistance, and to a contempt for such support as mere worldly wealth and power could give them; then, I am sure, it will be owned, the sticklers for Christianity had worldly reasons enough for their attachment to it. Their testimony, therefore, must be of little weight with us, who know what they gained by it.

Shep. Howsoever interested they may have been, yet, as the original evidence for Christianity was fixed in the writings of the evangelists and the immediate disciples of our Saviour; their successors, in later ages, could have added little to that evidence: and the question is not now concerning any testimony we pretend to derive from them, in favour of facts said to have been done so long before; but how far the original evidence, reduced to writing, may be reasonably suspected to have suffered by the hands through which it hath passed.

Temp. That is our present question.

Dech. But might not the interested clergy, of the fourth or fifth century, for instance, have forged those evidences, which now pass for original, and brought them into credit, by degrees, among those bigots, the then laity, over whose

understandings and consciences they had gained an entire ascendant? You know the very first ages produced abundance of gospels, epistles, Sibylline oracles, &c. which were received, for a time, in many churches, and afterward proved to be spurious. This being the case, those writings, which are now esteemed authentic, may have been forgeries too, for aught we, at this distance of time, can tell. Christians are not yet agreed about the canon of the Old Testament, nor were those of the first ages more unanimous about that of the New, several parts of which were not admitted into it till after a considerable tract of time, and many doubts concerning their genuineness.

Shep. All those doubts serve only to furnish us, in these ages, with the stronger assurances, that supposititious writings could not easily find admittance into the canon of the Scripture. We see, by the reception they met with, that our forefathers were scrupulous and careful to detect such impositions; and, had it not been for the distinction made between the spurious and genuine writings of the earlier ages, we could not, at this day, be certain that any care had been taken at all in that behalf; which would greatly have affected the credit of the Scriptures: so that this objection, drawn from counterfeit scriptures, and so much insisted on by libertines, is really a strong argument in favour of the true. No other ancient book can be so well proved to have been the work of the author it is now ascribed to, as every book of the New Testament can be proved to have been written by him whose name it hath all along borne; that is, by a writer who was an eyewitness of the facts he vouches, who received the doctrines he delivers from the immediate dictates of the Holy Ghost, and who proved his inspiration by the miracles he wrought. There were such distinctions made, and so much care taken, by the primitive church, to ascertain this, as leaves no room for doubts concerning it. You would be much better pleased, Mr. Dechaine, if you employed a person to receive a considerable sum of money for you, with his examining every piece by itself, and throwing out some, which he found to be either of base metal, or counterfeit coinage, than if he received the whole in bulk, and, without any farther scrutiny or trouble, gave a full discharge for it. His care in this matter, and detecting the false pieces, would

not, I believe, induce you to think all the money he received, as sterling, was counterfeit, and he himself an arrant cheat. As to those parts of the New Testament which were once doubted of, they were such writings as were directed to, and lodged in the hands of, particular churches; and as the primitive Christians were extremely shy of admitting performances, of any sort, to a level of authority, with such as were deemed of divine original; it is but natural to believe, some time ought to have passed before the writings mentioned could have been vouched for by the particular churches, from whence they were drawn, to the satisfaction of the Christian church in general. But this was very early accomplished, to the satisfaction of the primitive fathers; and afterward the canon of the New Testament was settled in the council of Laodicea, in respect to all the books, excepting the Apocalypse, which, as well as the rest, was received by other councils, and regarded, as the work of St. John, by the Christian church, and all the fathers, but Caius and St. Cyril. Such care was taken in this matter, that it can be no doubt among men of any acquaintance with the fathers, whether the several books of the New Testament were wrote by the persons whose names they bear; and such is the conformity between the doctrine of those few books, that were doubted of by some, and that of the rest, which were never questioned, that we cannot ascribe the suspicions of those who doubted, in opposition to the concurring testimony of so great a majority, to any thing else but an extreme scrupulosity.[a] The canon of the Jews is also clearly determined, and as firmly fixed, as any thing of that nature can be. The collection of the Sacred Writings made and revised by Ezra, who was himself inspired, and by those who, from him to Simon the Just, laboured in that work, was from their times, till the days of St. Jerome, entirely acquiesced in by all persons, whether Jews or Christians, who were any way concerned to think rightly about the genuineness of Scripture. The Pentateuch, wrote by Moses himself, was kept, with the utmost care, in the ark, and the temple, till the demolition of that fabric: during this period of time, the copies, transcribed from this original, were corrected by it, and must have been as perfect, as copies could be; because the whole behaviour

[a] See Bishop Gibson's third Pastoral Letter, sect. 4.

of the Israelites, as well civil as ceremonial, were regulated, and the original of all their genealogies, on which the unalienable title to lands depended, were ascertained. At the captivity, as the people were carried away from their own country, and had assurances given them by the prophets of a restoration; it was a thing absolutely necessary to preserve, with all possible scrupulosity, the authentic copies, not only of the Pentateuch, but of the prophecies, and other sacred writings, because on the former depended all the knowledge of the law, and all the distinctions of the tribes, and particular families; and on the latter all their hopes of a return to their own country, together with the happy and triumphant condition promised them under the Messiah. After the captivity, which lasted but seventy years, the canon of the Old Testament was formed, and a copy of the Scriptures authenticated; by which all other copies were corrected. From this time to our own, the Jews have preserved these books with a circumspection and scrupulosity that approached to superstition: nothing of this nature can be more certain, than that the books of the Old Testament, as they now stand, form the true canon of that Testament; the Jews own no other to this day. As to those Christians who would needs force a number of other books into the canon of the Old Testament, they have been so far from succeeding, in that attempt, with the universal church, that they cannot, with all their infallibility and policy, which goes a great deal farther, bring the learned and honest men, of their own communion, to be satisfied with such an impudent addition to the Scriptures. The great antiquity of some Apocryphal books, and the exalted sentiments contained in them, which seem to breathe an air of divinity, have not been sufficient, nor ever will, to pass them upon the scrupulosity and jealousy of the Christian world. As to the question, whether the four gospels, and the other books of the New Testament, might not have been forged by the interested and designing clergy, in the fourth or fifth or any other century, when it was now worth their while to lie and cheat, for their religion; I think it can be no question at all with sober people. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, did the emperors and great men of the world endow the church with lands, and otherwise enrich it, before our

Saviour had been heard of among mankind; or was it after he had been much talked of, or even believed in, by themselves?

Dech. No doubt it was after.

Shep. What think you? Were those great men so weak, as to give up their assent, and their lands, to a set of men, who told them a story of most incredible facts, performed three or four hundred years ago, for which they could not produce any written account or record, and had only their own words to vouch for such a tale?

Dech. Some written history they probably had, to produce concerning those facts.

Shep. You suppose, then, they suppressed those older histories, which had been so beneficial to them, and had acquired them so much credit and wealth; and forged new ones?

Dech. I do not suppose this.

Shep. Pray, sir, be pleased, at the same time, to consider, that, in order to make their forgery pass on the world, they must have also forged all those writings said to have been published in the three or four first centuries, that speak of nothing else but our Saviour and his religion, and quote innumerable passages from the four Gospels, and the other books of the New Testament: nay, what is infinitely more difficult than all this, they must have either made their contemporaries believe all these writings of the evangelists, apostles, and fathers, were wrote by their respective authors long since, and carefully concealed till that time; or else they must have persuaded them, that they, namely, their contemporaries, had been reading, transcribing, and arguing, from those writings, all their lives, though not one mortal ever saw a single line of them.

Temp. This had been impossible.

Shep. And if this was a thing impossible for the clergy to effect, in the fourth or fifth century, it was just as impossible, in any other age, from Christ's time to our own.

Temp. I really think so.

Dech. But if they had forged and interpolated such passages into the old records and writings, as served their particular views and ends; this might have done as well.

Shep. It might, perhaps; but what reasons have you for thinking them guilty of this fraud?

Dech. It is enough to be sensible, that they might have thought it conducive to their ends: this will render the Scriptures, which might have been so corrupted in some places, suspected in all; and will serve to shew, that, in a matter of so great importance, and in respect to relations of facts so unlikely, writings conveyed down through a long tract of time, and through hands so interested and partial, are not to be depended on. Now, that they had many and weighty ends to serve, by such interpolations of Scripture, will be plain, if we consider, that Christ had scarcely left the world, when the Christians began to be miserably divided about matters of the greatest importance; such as, Whether their Master was a God, or a man: Whether it was necessary, that the Jewish law should be observed by the Gentile converts: Whether the resurrection of the dead was to be understood in a spiritual or corporeal sense: Whether it was already past, or to be expected hereafter: Whether a promiscuous use of women was consistent with Christianity, or not. These difficulties and disputes, instead of being settled by the authority of inspiration and miracles, generated a swarm of other divisions and subdivisions, which embroiled the five or six first centuries, proved too hard for the councils to settle, and were never tolerably adjusted, till arbitrary power, ignorance, and bigotry, did it, in the monkish ages. Now, parson, you will own, that, in such violent struggles, which engaged and inflamed the passions of all sects and parties, when the very souls of men were drawn into the war, and a triumph so very eagerly panted after; as a single express text of Scripture would have turned the scale of a whole controversy, you will own, I believe, the contending parties were strongly tempted to forge, and then trump up, such a text. It would have given peace to the church, you know, and done a world of good; and a little piece of pious fraud, for so good a purpose, might possibly have seemed no unpardonable sin, to a good old father of the church. For my part, I have the charity for those venerable old gentlemen, to believe they had more sense, especially those of the orthodox party, as it called itself, than to scruple the use of so wholesome, and so healing an imposition.

Shep. They are much obliged to you. And so you take

all these good old gentlemen, and fathers, as you call them, to have been a parcel of monstrous cheats and impostors?

Dech. No; not every individual one of them.

Shep. For my part, I look upon the far greater number of them to have been the very best of men.

Dech. And pray, sir, for what reason?

Shep. Because they despised the world; denied themselves not only the vicious, but what seem, to others, the innocent pleasures of life; and died most nobly, as many of them as were put to the trial, for the religion they professed. Now, sir, I can hardly suspect such men of forgery and sacrilege, the most villanous and impious that can be imagined. To steal the name and authority of Almighty God, in order to cheat the world into a belief of doctrines, not made necessary by his word, but merely invented by themselves, and that for no benefit to be reaped by them; is a degree of boldness and impiety, not to say folly, which, I believe, the most hardened impostor upon earth would be shocked at. But though some of them might have been so wicked as to attempt a fraud of this kind; was there never a one found so honest as to detect it? Did they all conspire to corrupt a religion, which they had so high a veneration for, as to die in its defence? Let us grant, however, that this or that party of the clergy were guilty of such a fraud; since, as you observe, they had other parties to watch and oppose them, they must have greatly exposed themselves, and totally destroyed the credit of the cause they were engaged in, had they been detected in so scandalous a cheat: and that they must have been detected, is beyond all question, unless their adversaries had wisely winked at the imposition, and helped to pass it on themselves. They had no sort of temptation to steal a passage into the Scripture, or materially to change the least sentence or word in it, but in order to a triumph over some of their opponents; and this itself they could not effect without a miracle, as amazing, to the full, as any ever said to have been wrought since the creation of the world. They must have inserted the new text, or made the alteration mentioned, all at once, in every Bible, whether in the hands of the laity or clergy over the whole Christian world; nay, and they must have fixed the interpolation too in every author who might have happened

to quote the passage of Scripture into which they were to foist it, and in the head of every person, whether clergyman or layman, who might have remembered the portion of Scripture they intended to enlarge or alter.

Dech. This appears plausible; but the writings of all the ancient Christians, excepting those of the orthodox, having been purposely destroyed by that party, or lost in the gulf of monkish ignorance, it is not to be wondered at, that we cannot now-a-days produce the clashing copies of the Scriptures, that might have been set up by party against party in the primitive times.

Shep. I have already shewn, that material differences between various copies of the Scriptures have in all ages of the church, been a thing next to impossible. Some differences, indeed, might, and did arise; but either they were of no consequence in the controversies of Christians, or, if they were, they were easily adjusted by collating of copies, especially of the new with the old, and two or three successions of copies were sufficient to extend from Christ's time to the present. As to the monkish ages, in which Popery prevailed over the western churches, it was, indeed, the most favourable period of time for corrupting the Scriptures, excepting the present, in which so little care or attention is given to those ancient records. But we have sufficient reason to acquit the Romish church of the corruption you insinuate against her. The Papists certainly did not, in the monkish ages, attempt this fraud, having no occasion for it, as the Scriptures, during that time, lay in languages little understood by even the clergy, and still less by the laity; as they were in little use, either for regulating the faith and manners of men, or for the determination of controversies, the spirit of controversy being, in those days, almost asleep; and as the western world was so much at the devotion of the pope, that neither he, nor his clergy, had much reason to fear the Scriptures should ever give them any disturbance. Accordingly, when the Reformation broke out, and the Protestants every where appealed to the Scriptures, the Papists had the work of corrupting and perverting the word of God, to begin, when it was too late; and therefore they had no better shift, than to vilify it on all occasions, and set up oral tradition in its stead. Now if they had been so free

with the Scriptures as you intimate, it is very surprising they should not have expunged, or at least qualified, those passages in the sacred writings that so strongly oppose the pretensions of the popes. But it is far from true, that the partisans of the popes had the Scriptures entirely in their hands during those ages in which debate and inquiry are said to have taken so long a nap. The eastern churches, with which they had almost perpetual contests, sometimes about image-worship, sometimes about the patriarchate, sometimes about discipline, and the procession of the Holy Ghost, made it impracticable for them to corrupt the Scriptures: besides, they were generally engaged with one another in warm disputes about grace, predestination, and the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and had, moreover, the Waldenses and the Wickliffites to deal with, towards the latter end of this darker period of the church. Although the differences that exercised the pens, and drew the attention, of those ages, were not so frequent as those of the foregoing; yet they were sufficient to hinder the corruption of the Scriptures: and, accordingly, the manuscripts of those Scriptures found in the Greek churches at the revival of learning, differed not, in any thing material, from those of the Latin churches. Pray, gentlemen, if any one should now publish a new edition of the Bible, and, in some convenient place, insert such a passage as would, if generally received, decide the controversy about the divinity of Christ, or the supremacy of the pope; would his interpolation serve the cause it was brought in aid of?

Temp. No; it would rather hurt it, and bring an imputation of the greatest impiety and impudence on the editor.

Shep. I suppose the future editors of the Bible would not copy his, at least in this spurious passage.

Temp. So far from that, they would not print one chapter, nor even a single verse, after a book, in which the like disingenuity might have corrupted any other place, as well as that.

Shep. It is plain, I think, that no man, who did not intend to lose all his labour and expenses, and make waste paper of his whole edition, would either begin, or second, such a senseless cheat: so that, if a publisher had no other principle to act on, but his own profit, he would endeavour

to give his customers as correct and faithful an edition as he could. Now what is said of printers, may, with equal truth, be said of copiers; and that cheat, which could not be passed upon the world in these times, could no more have been passed upon it in former ages. Our forefathers, of whom modern libertines speak on this topic, as if they passed their lives in the profoundest sleep or stupidity, were more attentive, and more awake to religious matters, than we are: and if those who are most indifferent to the affairs of religion might be the most easily deceived by a surreptitious text of Scripture; there never was an age, since Christ, so capable of being imposed on, this way, as the present. Give me leave, upon the whole, to observe to you, that writings, once proved to be of divine original and authority, and, as such, admitted by the whole church into the canon of Scripture, must have been from that time regarded by all Christians as sacred; and, being made the rule of their behaviour, the basis of all their tenets and persuasions, and the decider of all their disputes, could not have been materially corrupted, because every church, and almost every family, were defended, by their own copies, against the errors or corruption of such other copies, as their adversaries might have argued from against them. But, before the canon of Scripture was settled and received by the Catholic church, manuscripts of the inspired authors, which were not only still extant, but perfectly fresh and legible, and held in the highest veneration, as sacred relics, by all the churches, were sufficient to correct and ascertain all the transcripts of the New Testament, throughout the Christian world. These sacred originals, thus highly esteemed by all Christians, continued in the church till long after the genuine books of Scripture were sufficiently distinguished from the spurious, and the whole text of the New Testament so precisely settled, that no reasonable man could dispute it, unless in some few passages, rendered immaterial, either by the indifferent tendency of their contents, or by the abundance of other undisputed passages, that made good the same doctrines. To conclude, we cannot conceive it possible, that so many thousands of people should, in so short a time, croud into the church of Christ, in the teeth of all their inveterate prejudices, and of the most outrageous persecutions, had not

miracles been every where wrought for their conviction; nor can we, without horrible blasphemy against the wisdom of God, suppose, that he should have wrought so many miracles to propagate a religion, which was to depend on the genuineness of its records, and yet not provide sufficiently, whether by divine or human means, against the change or corruption of those records. If the ordinary methods of his providence had not been sufficient for this purpose, we cannot help concluding, that he would have vouchsafed a series of miracles, to ascertain the genuineness of the Scriptures, as well as to prove the doctrines, contained in them, to be divine: for our conviction must have been a part of his intention, as well as that of the Christians in the apostolic age. But what hath been already said is sufficient to shew, that no such series of miracles was necessary, and that we have a true and genuine copy of the Scriptures preserved to us by the ordinary course of God's providence. Now, sir, as you have only objected that corruptions, mutilations, and additions, might have crept into the Scriptures; give me leave to observe to you, that it is very unfair in you, or any other Deist, to conclude from thence, that such did actually creep in, unless you can give instances; and let me tell you, if that could have been done to any purpose, the sagacious leaders and writers of your fraternity would not have contented themselves with mere suspicions and surmises on this head, instead of instances. All that could be grubbed up of this sort, they drew from the writings of divines, who have been so careful and ingenuous, as to publish them in their works; so far were they from endeavouring either to huddle up any mistakes made by the copiers of former times, or to introduce new corruptions of their own: and, when malice and ingenuity have made the utmost of these, they are neither capable of hurting any truth, nor establishing any error. Thus having, as fully as the time would permit, vindicated the Scriptures against your objections, or rather suspicions, about their genuineness; I bring them as the authentic records of our religion, records that have passed the test of those ages in which their authenticity could have been properly tried, and therefore cannot now be called in question, unless you can demonstrably shew when they were actually forged, or when and wherein they were corrupted.

I call upon you, in the name of truth, to do this; and must put you in mind, that mere suspicions and may-be's will be of no more weight, in this case, than against a well recorded patent, by which an estate hath been possessed during a series of seventeen hundred years.

Dech. The two cases are widely different; for the title to an estate, founded on an ancient patent, will, after a long possession, be good, although that patent should have been forged, or illegally obtained; whereas prescription cannot be insisted on in favour of opinions, or for the credibility of facts.

Shep. We claim no such prescription. But as I have offered some arguments of weight for the genuineness of the Scriptures, and proved, I hope, to the satisfaction of Mr. Templeton, that they neither were, nor could have been, materially corrupted; it is now your business to demonstrate the forgery, or corruption of these records, just as you do that of a deed or patent, in one of the courts at Westminster, after having heard the evidence produced in its favour by the lawyers on the opposite side. The judges, you know, would laugh at you, if, in such a case, you should only urge, that the deed might have been forged, or the patent, when the original was almost destroyed by time, might have been corrupted in the transcribing.

Dech. It is very well, indeed: so no passage of Scripture could ever have been mutilated, or altered. Yet we are told, by the divines themselves, that there are thirty thousand various readings in the copies of the New Testament, as it stands at present.

Shep. Not as it stands at present. They say, indeed, that the manuscripts, from whence our present editions of the New Testament were printed, contained, in the whole, upwards of thirty thousand various readings: but as the errors of one manuscript were easily set right by another, and by the sense and context; the New Testament, as it is published at present, is clogged with no such variety of readings. It is true, they are given in some editions, published for the use of the curious and learned, and to shew, against all the cavils of libertines, the fair dealing of those who took care to give us as exact a sight, as possible, of the New Testament in the original language; that such persons,

as cannot peruse the vast variety of manuscripts, may judge for themselves, whether the editors have dealt honestly by them. The ingenious Phileleutherus Lipsiensis hath shewn, to demonstration, that the great abundance of manuscripts, brought from Egypt, Asia, and the western churches, hath enabled us to settle the sacred text, by collating the one with the other, and following that reading which is most agreeable to the sense, upon the clearest and most incontestible footing; which could never have been done, had there been but one or two manuscripts to print from: so this, instead of being an objection against the genuineness of the New Testament, as it stands at present, is the strongest argument, in its favour, that the nature of the thing admits of. It is for this reason, he observes, that we can never have a tolerable edition of either Velleius Paterculus, or Hesychius, because there happened to be but one manuscript of each preserved; and that Terence is now in a better condition than any of the classic writers, merely on account of the great variety of manuscripts, by which the editors of that author adjusted their editions. He says, he saw at least twenty thousand various readings in the manuscripts of this little book, and is sure, that had the same scrupulous care been taken to collate all the manuscripts of Terence, that was employed about those of the New Testament, the number of the various readings must have amounted to fifty thousand. After all the noise made by libertines about various readings, they were little more than literal and involuntary errors of the transcribers, incapable of serving any party, or influencing any debate; and ten times the number might be gathered out of half the printed Bibles in Europe, which, all put together, are of no consequence to any one doctrine, controverted, or agreed on.

Dech. It was not thought so, when Sixtus V. published his edition of the Bible; it was called the Protestant Bible; and one of his successors did what he could to call in all the copies of that edition, and then came out with one of his own, between which and that of Sixtus, a divine of the church of England, hath, I am told, publicly noted about two thousand differences.

Shep. It is not to be wondered at in a pope, that he should endeavour to suppress the honest edition, though of his pre-

decessor, and give the world a corrupt one of his own, more favourable to his pretensions; but that is far from proving that the latter could be supported with sufficient authority, or imposed on the Christian world.

Temp. I have now seen, what I did not hope for, a satisfactory proof that miracles are a strong evidence of a mission from God, especially when the tendency of that mission is worthy of the divine goodness, and necessary to the reformation and happiness of mankind; that this evidence can be communicated to those who never saw the miracles, and that the records of it may be made lasting and perpetual. The evidence for the facts of the Christian history is incomparably clearer and stronger than that for the assassination of Cæsar, which yet it would be madness in any to question. Nobody died for the truth of what is said, concerning that fact, by historians; nobody was concerned, at the peril of his eternal salvation, to preserve the records of it uncorrupted; and if it may be said, that nobody was concerned to corrupt them, or to impose such a story on posterity, it may be as truly said, that no mortal could think it his duty to prevent such an imposition. But the testimony given to the Christian history hath this peculiar to itself, and beyond all other historical testimony, that it was, in all worldly respects, the unquestionable interest of those who vouched and died for it, to deny and renounce it to all mankind. I did not imagine, Mr. Shepherd, you could have cleared up this important point so well; and as I have the vanity to think you had my satisfaction in some measure in view, I return you my hearty thanks for what you have done.

Shep. Had you looked into the writings of many divines among us, who have handled these points more fully and ably than I can pretend to do, you might have seen this long ago.

Temp. The difficulties came oftener in my way than the solutions; and, besides, I doubted of my own judgment, and was afraid to examine.

Dech. Thou art born to be the ass, the packhorse, of some priest, and to drudge under him, and his bundle of superstitious implements, to the day of thy death. Is it not the parson's trade to deal in such wares as he hath here huddled together? And will you give up yourself to a man

who makes a livelihood by imposing on you, and others, in these matters?

Temp. If it is a trade, I am sorry, poor man, he does not thrive better by it.

Dech. I rather think, he hath more than he deserves.

Shep. Indeed I have.

Dech. No doubt you think so: but this I think, that you are happy in having Mr. Templeton for a disciple, who goes more than half way to meet every limping argument you propose to him.

Shep. I shall think myself very happy indeed, if the gentleman is, by my means, even introduced to an inquiry concerning matters of the greatest consequence to him. As what I have said was with that view only, I hope he will not satisfy himself with a chain of reasoning so cursory, but look farther, and consult those writers who have exhausted the subjects we have been only chatting over.

Dech. But, Mr. Shepherd, you have all this while been proving nothing, only that the Christian religion may possibly recommend itself as a probable history of facts to the learned, who are masters of Greek and Hebrew, and who make but a small part of mankind. Before it can be made at all intelligible to the vulgar, who alone are capable of an hearty acquiescence in it, you know it must be translated into their own languages. Now there are no two languages in the world, though spoken for many ages in adjacent countries, the words and phrases of which exactly correspond; but if any two nations be greatly removed from each other, in time and situation, as they widely differ in their buildings, dress, food, customs, furniture, instruments of husbandry and mechanism; so it is impossible to make a tolerable translation of any book out of the one language into the other, when the terms and phrases of those languages are so incongruous. If, moreover, the people of the one nation are much addicted to parabolical and figurative expressions, and those of the other affect a plainness of speaking; this will considerably increase the difficulty; so much of the beauty and propriety of the plainest performance is lost in the most careful translation you can make of it into the nearest language to that of the original, that, as Don Quixote hath observed, the original may be justly compared to the

right side of the arras, where all the figures appear in their due proportions, and natural colours; and the translation to the wrong side, where the proportions, and colours, and shades, are all, in a manner, blended together, and presented to the eye in the greatest confusion. Hence it will unavoidably proceed, that he who reads the Scriptures translated into any modern language, as he is unacquainted with the names of things, and the phrases used by the original authors, will have but little or no taste of the peculiar manner and propriety; and, what is worse, can never be sure he rightly apprehends their meaning; especially as the translators may, either through ignorance or design, have given a wrong turn to passages of the greatest consequence.

Shep. The Scriptures have not been translated, as other books usually are, by one person, but by many, who must all have been either ignorant or dishonest; or material perversions could not have taken place. And as to ours, it was re-examined by the convocation; and they must have been an illiterate sort of men, if they could not have seen how to rectify such mistakes of consequence, as might have passed the first concoction. And to say they knew well enough how to rectify them, but all conspired to impose a false translation on the world; is to make them all a parcel of the greatest knaves and fools that ever lived. The mere suspicions of men, who have little or no religion, and the groundless calumnies of bitter enemies to our religion, will never be able to render them suspected, by honest and sober people, of a conspiracy to pervert the word of God, to act so unfaithfully between him and his people. But whatever we may think of their consciences, they must have had some regard to their characters, at least; and, surely, nothing could have rendered them so odious and despicable, in the judgment of all men, as unfaithful dealing in a business of this nature. The eyes of their most implacable adversaries were upon them—adversaries who were well versed both in the original languages, and in the English; and they knew full well, that those who would have burnt their bodies, would not spare their reputations. This is sufficient to convince those of the meanest understandings among us, that our translators and revisers did their best. Now what I have said of the English translation of the Scriptures, may be truly said, with little variation, of the other translations of

the same writings, made near our own times. The ablest and best hands were chosen out for that purpose, in Holland, and other Protestant countries; and their work, when finished in concert, underwent many and severe revisals. It is true, all the translations have their defects; but it is your business to shew us, that all, or any of those defects, are sufficient to pervert either the principles or practice of those, who, not understanding the original languages, are obliged to have recourse to the translations. Many Papists, of great learning, have acknowledged the faithfulness of our versions; and the champions of that church undertake to refute the Protestants out of their own translations. This is a common practice with them, and, in my opinion, a strong proof, as it comes from such implacable adversaries, that our translators have acquitted themselves, at least, like honest men. If, however, the case be otherwise, why are your ablest writers so remiss, as not to support themselves with instances of perverted passages in our translations? Now, that the work they had in hand was neither impossible, nor of so great difficulty as you represent it, I hope I shall fairly make appear. If a book, wrote by one of the inhabitants of Jupiter or Saturn, were to be translated into some of the languages spoken here on earth, I do not know but your sentiments on this subject might be true enough, as to such an undertaking. When the writer, and those for whose use he is translated, have little or nothing in common, he can scarcely be rendered intelligible to them. But, as the senses and rational faculties of all men are the same, their general notions can be transfused out of one language into another, without undergoing the smallest change or loss. Hence it comes to pass, that religious or moral treatises, the notions and terms of which must, by the nature of the subject, be, for the most part, general and common, are more easily translated than any other sort of writings.

Dech. But as the doctrinal and practical part of your religion lies interspersed with the historical in the Scriptures, and as history treats of manners, customs, buildings, clothes, implements of war and arts, this, it must be confessed, renders a translation of those writings more difficult, than that of mere moral or religious performances.

Shep. This difficulty is purely critical, affects not the

clearness or truth of the main facts; and, besides, it is far from being so great as you represent it. The custom, only alluded to in one passage, is more fully described in another, or by such ancient writers, whether Jewish, Christian, or profane, as lived in or near the times. The terms of arts, sciences, buildings, &c. can be well supplied, as they are few and simple, from the same or the like arts, sciences, &c. among modern nations. As to small differences in such matters, it is of no consequence whether they are lost in the translation or not: for example; it is no way material to any doctrine of faith or practice, to put the English word garments for *ἱμάτια*, Matt. xxvii. 35, although our clothes are of a different make from those of our Saviour. The English reader is at no loss to understand what is said concerning the parting of Christ's garments, for not being told that they were long, plain, and flowing, after the manner of the eastern nations, and consisting of a kind of cassock and surtout. You seem to lay great stress on the figurative or parabolical expressions, as if it were impossible to render them intelligible in countries where a plainness of speech is affected: but it happens, that no sort of expression is more common in all nations, and to all sorts of people, than the figurative and metaphorical. All languages would be miserably barren and defective, if such modes of expression were thrown out of them; and if you consider the matter ever so little, you will find there are an infinity of things that cannot be reasoned on, nor talked about at all, in any language upon earth, but by that very way. Those words, that seem to be most simply and immediately adapted to our notions are often of this kind; as for instance, 'understanding, discourse, imagination, recollection,' &c. The eastern nations were fonder of figurative expressions, of parables and allusions, than the Europeans: yet we are fond enough of them too; and use them so familiarly, that we neither want terms to translate them by, nor a taste and turn of mind to apprehend them. It is worth while to observe to you on this subject, that, although some nations may affect one kind of figure more than another, yet the figures used by all nations are nearly, if not precisely, the same; and that the eastern nations, who were much addicted to metaphor and allusion, are less free with the other figures than the Greeks, Romans,

or modern Europeans. All this, however, is only speculation on both sides; but fact and experience, which are of more decisive force than ten thousand refinements of this nature, are strongly on my side, and that in point. There never was so literal a translation of any book, though out of one modern language into another, as the English version of the Old and New Testament; and yet our plain illiterate Englishmen read and understand it very well, much better, I am sure, than they could any one philosophical or deistical performance, though wrote originally in their own mother-tongue. Nay, what is more, although it is put into their hands in such a manner as is apt to infuse an early disrelish, that is, by those who, with a rod in one hand, and a Bible in the other, teach them to read and spell by it; and although, by the time they come to the use of reason, and some little taste for reading, there is not a single passage, description, or character in it, that is not old and stale to them; yet they are highly pleased, and powerfully moved, by it: which shews, I think, that the spirit of the original is not only well preserved, but strongly and faithfully conveyed in the translation. This experimental proof in point makes it unnecessary to remind you, that Herodotus, Thucydides, and even the poet Homer, the oldest of the Greek writers, are clearly understood in English, although beholding, each of them, to the care and learning of a single translator. But men who, while they were at school or the university, had neither capacity nor application sufficient to make them masters of antiquities, ancient history, or the learned languages, coming afterward into the world very raw and imperfect scholars, imagine nobody can translate the ancient authors to any tolerable purpose, because they could not do it themselves; and so their ignorance and vanity together beget in them this species of infidelity we have been speaking to. Upon the whole, a person well versed in ancient learning can more easily apprehend the meaning of the very oldest writers, than half-learned pretenders are apt to imagine; and what he once clearly apprehends and conceives, he can clearly express in his own language, either literally, or at least by paraphrase. If this were not the case, there could not be so great an agreement between the translations of Scripture, made in very distant ages and countries, and

by persons who could not possibly have combined. But, as we have already dwelt much longer on this topic than it seems to deserve, I shall dismiss it with this observation, that your arguments against the possibility of turning the Scriptures into modern languages, are precisely the same with those urged by the Papists against all the reformed churches: but I neither pretend to guess from whence you drew those arguments, nor with what view you press them.

Dech. That inuendo is very weak. A good argument is nothing the worse for having been used by a Papist, or any body else, though ever so ignorant and bigotted. But, if the sense of the Scripture was so very obvious to the learned, it is a little strange, methinks, that the learned commentators should find it so difficult a matter to settle and agree about it. The commentators of a thousand different or opposite opinions, pretend to draw the clearest proofs and demonstrations for their respective persuasions, from their various interpretations of Scripture. And well they may, since there is such a clashing between the historical and typical, the literal and allegorical, and between the strict and plain sense of many passages on the one side, and the mystical, parabolical, or hyperbolical sense, on the other, as leaves an almost boundless latitude of interpretation.

Shep. Could you shew, that the different interpretations and contradictions of commentators, which is far from being so great as you seem to make it, arise from the real difficulty and obscurity of the Scriptures, you would thereby gain a great advantage to your cause. But the case is quite otherwise. Most men are strongly attached to their own religious persuasions, whether through prejudice of education, if they continue in the opinions of their parents, or through self-conceit, if they happen to have made any choice of opinions themselves. There is another vanity which is apt to carry writers of all sorts to great lengths; I mean that of supporting a new-invented hypothesis. A writer thinks he does nothing, if he does not strike out something that is new in the art or science he writes about. Now religion abounds with these hypothetical contrivers of opinions, as much as natural or moral philosophy; and the Scripture must be tortured and wrested a thousand ways, to make it speak for as many unscriptural systems, invented by brainsick and con-

ceited wretches, who have much learning and little judgment. Besides, no small part of those commentaries, that feed the bigotry of contending churches, was wrote by mercenaries, set on and bribed to the impious work by salaries and views of promotion. If then bigotry, vanity, and interest, are allowed to step in between the plainest writings, and those for whose use they were intended, there is no degree nor variety of absurdity which, by the help of art and learning, they may not force those writings seemingly to countenance, so far, I mean, as to rivet those who are already inclinable to the absurdities they comment for, and often to stagger others who have no such previous inclination. The writer of manifestoes and other political papers, can fully demonstrate, in any quarrel between two princes, that by such and such treaties, formerly ratified on both sides, each prince had been the aggressor, although the treaties, appealed to by the political hirelings of each party, are couched in terms as strong and explicit as language can afford. The several laws in the code of Justinian are conceived in the most strict and precise terms; and yet the writers of civil law have found means to contradict one another in numberless instances, and to support themselves, on all sides, by voluminous tracts and commentaries on the code. I cannot say all our acts of parliament are as plain and explicit as were to be wished; yet some of them are intelligible enough; this, however, does not hinder the lawyers from frequently arguing, from the plainest of them, for both sides in the same trial. From all this it appears, that we are not to ascribe the different or opposite interpretations of those, who pretend to explain or comment on any writings, entirely to the obscurity of those writings, since we can so easily trace their contradictions, in most cases, to partiality in themselves.

Dech. If such variety and dissonance of interpretation may arise among the commentators of the plainest performances, what may we expect from those, who labour in the explication of books so figurative, as the Scriptures?

Shep. As to the noise which many commentators on the sacred text have raised, and which the Deists make such a jingle with, about hyperbolical, parabolical, mystical, allegorical interpretations, &c. it may serve, indeed, to give

their performances the greater shew of depth and learning, and to furnish the ludicrous Deist with a sort of polemical rattle: but the plain and rational reader of the Scriptures, who is just so much the wiser for never having heard even the sound of it, finds himself as little concerned in the types, as in the interpretation of the Apocalypse, unless where they are actually explained and applied by the sacred writers themselves; finds the allegories and the parables, not only simple and plain, but beautiful and affecting; and finds himself very far from being hindered, by their means, from gathering, out of the sacred pages, the most useful instructions, and the most powerful persuasives to a good life. As this is too notoriously true to be denied, no ridiculous cant of hard words will weigh with sober people against their own experience, of which they feel the great and happy effects. But had not those interpreters of the book of nature, I mean the ancient and modern philosophers, made far wilder work, and run into infinitely more and wider contradictions, concerning the most necessary points, both of knowledge and practice, which, you say, are clearly delivered in that universal book, you might have objected the various interpretations of holy writ with a much better grace. This whole argument of yours hath often been employed by the Papists to persuade the world, that the Scriptures are useless, nay, and pernicious, as well to the learned as to the illiterate, without the help of an infallible interpreter.

Dech. From your unfair way of endeavouring to refute my arguments, by rendering them suspected of a popish tendency, I foresee you will trace that which I am going to offer to the very Vatican.

Shep. This I know, that if the arguments you have been urging this pretty while, were admitted, and followed to their utmost consequences, they would lead us all to the pope's toe.

Dech. Be that as it will, I shall not stick to insist, that the common people and the illiterate, even in Protestant countries, have no more of Christianity, than what depends on implicit faith in their priests. As priests of all religions, according to the excellent saying of the poet, are the same,

so the vulgar, in all Christian countries, are, in respect to faith and religion, exactly on the same footing. They may believe what is told them, but they can examine nothing; and all you have been saying concerning the purity of the Scripture, and the fidelity of its translators, may be either true or false, for ought they can know. The Scriptures, when translated into their own languages, may be perfectly intelligible to them; and you may work them up, in your own imagination, into as able commentators as you please, which, I think, is but moderately consistent with your dogmatizing to them, every Sunday, on some portion of Scripture or other; yet, I cannot for my life see how they, who make the majority of mankind, and for whose use therefore God must have chiefly intended any religion he ever gave to the world, can rationally satisfy themselves, that the Scriptures have been preserved uncorrupted, or faithfully translated. Miracles may have been wrought, records of these may have been made, enthusiasts of former ages may have been put to death for insisting on the truth of these records, and the animosities of contending Christians may have all along secured the purity of those records, and learning may at length have helped to procure a tolerable translation of them into the vulgar languages; but how little of this knowledge in antiquity and history can be supposed to reach a tradesman or farmer? If we should ask one of them, why he believes the Bible to be the word of God, the utmost he could say, would be, that he believes it, because the parson tells him so, and that parson would not tell him a lie.

Shep. Perhaps it might be so; and if you were to examine him as a witness in a trial, concerning facts he had seen with his own eyes, he might chance to give you a very lame account of those facts, nay, and without the least intention to render a false evidence, actually contradict himself. Those sort of people, it is true, frequently know but little; and what they do know, they cannot express. But what they do know, is one thing; and what they might know, is another. What they might know concerning the Bible, as it is put into their hands, if I take you right, is our present question.

Dech. It is.

Shep. Does not an illiterate man find, that all people,

whom he hath any dealings or conversation with, are agreed, that the Bible is the word of God?

Dech. Perhaps he does. What then?

Shep. Is he not sensible, that the Papists, and all other denominations of Christians, are of the same sentiments?

Dech. I cannot tell but he may; but pray, sir, what is that to the purpose?

Shep. It is a great step to his conviction, that so many people of all ranks and conditions, great numbers of whom are very learned, and differ widely in many matters, agree so exactly in this.

Dech. It is, I own; but that step hath no foundation in reason.

Shep. It hath some. What many people, especially if they are not all illiterate and ignorant, agree in, is more likely to be true, than if nobody, or very few, and those very ignorant, were of that opinion. But if he should have reason to think, that all the great lords, and estated gentlemen in the kingdom, believe the Bible to be the word of God, would not this be a good reason to confirm him in the same opinion?

Dech. No, because they might be mistaken; and besides, it is impossible for him to know whether they be really of that opinion or not.

Shep. He knows that such people are generally well educated, and that there are great numbers among them, who are men of much discernment and knowledge; who would never go to church and sacrament, and suffer their estates to be tythed by the clergy, if they did not believe the Bible to be the word of God. The most ignorant of the vulgar know, that, in matters of interest and money, all sorts of people look very sharp, and hardly part with a farthing, without very good reasons for so doing. They see the knowing and learned part of their own lay body suffer the bishops, and inferior clergy, when they might hinder them, if they pleased, to enjoy a great income annually in lands and tythes, merely on the score of the Bible. No man can be so ignorant as not to know, that men so fond of wealth, and often so needy, would never permit the clergy to enjoy so much, which they might take to themselves, did they not think there was some truth in the Christian religion;

and their appearing by this expensive proof to think so, is a strong argument for their sincerity; by which means it happens, that the more ignorant people among us have all the sagacity, penetration, and knowledge of the greatest men in the nation to judge with, concerning the genuineness of the Scriptures, and consequently, have more reason to pin their faith on the sleeves of their lay superiors, than on those of the clergy, who do not lose, as the lords and gentlemen do, but gain, by the Bible. The ignorant part of mankind derive still stronger assurances for their faith in Christianity from the writings of the greatest, the wisest, and best laymen that ever lived. Even kings have employed their pens on the Christian religion; and laymen, distinguished from the rest of the world by their wisdom and virtue, have rendered themselves no less illustrious by the strength and piety of their writings in defence, or explanation, of Christianity. Every Christian country hath produced numbers of these; and, in our own, Sir Matthew Hale, the honourable Mr. Boyle, Lord Nottingham, Mr. Nelson, Mr. Addison, and Sir Isaac Newton, are but a few out of many learned and judicious laymen, who have employed the finest talents, and the worthiest hearts, in the service of Christianity. Some of the writings of these great men are intelligible enough to the most ordinary capacities; and those of them, that are more learned and refined, demonstrate this at least, to the most ignorant, that their authors were Christians.

Dech. And pray, are these all the reasons ignorant people have for believing the Bible to be the word of God?

Shep. No; they can easily perceive, that to impose such a book on all the knowing part of the world for the word of God, if it were only the invention of men, had been a thing impossible; that this very book itself condemns such an imposition, and threatens it with the most dreadful denunciations; that many wise and excellent men died for the genuineness and free use of it in their own country, and not very long before their own times; and that no mortal they converse with, hath ever denied it to be the word of God; or, if any one hath done so, that he hath never assigned any reason for so doing, worthy in the least to be set in opposition to the grounds and reasons of their faith. But that plain and illiterate Christians have some other authority for

their faith in the gospel-history, than the mere word of their priests, is evident from hence, that in places where the ill lives of clergymen, and the continual outcry of the great ones against them, have taught the common people to despise and distrust them, yet Christianity is not entirely laid aside. All the sensible and virtuous people of such places have so great confidence in its truth, and are so well satisfied with it, that they will go to church, hear a man preach (whom they regard as vile and worthless), join with him in the prayers, and take the sacrament from his hands. Many illiterate persons, who think very contemptibly of the clergy in general, are, however, firm in their belief of Christianity. They must therefore have some other grounds for their faith, than the word of a priest, whom they despise, nay, and hate most cordially, as a self-interested wretch, that thinks of little else, than eating and drinking the fruits of their labour, and spunging on their faith. The truth is, they mind but little what the priest says, either in the pulpit or out of it; and it is really from their parents, who were perhaps as averse and inattentive to the priest as themselves, and from the Bible, that they gather the greater part of what they know, concerning religious matters; so that the course of their knowledge hath run mostly in a lay-channel for a long track of ages. There is one consideration yet unmentioned, from whence the most unlearned layman may, if he reflects or thinks at all about religious matters, furnish himself with a kind of demonstration for the truth of the gospel-history, at least in the main points. He not only sees a religion professed by prodigious numbers of people, learned and illiterate; but he also sees one day in seven set apart for the service of God, according to that religion; he sees the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper received by all sorts and ranks of men; and he sees a ministry supported at a very considerable expense, purely to teach the principles of this religion, and to administer its sacraments. Now he cannot imagine all these usages and expenses could have taken their rise from nothing; or that the history of our Saviour, on which they wholly depend, could have passed upon the world, or gained credit, in any age, had it been altogether a figment. He knows mankind would not at first have submitted to the constant celebration of a rite, that

threatens those who assist at it, without amendment of life, with damnation, if they had not known its author, or been fully satisfied about the truth of that religion, of which it makes a part. He knows the world would never have given up a seventh part of their time, which might be profitably applied to their worldly affairs; nor the tenth, or a much greater part of their substance, for the support of men, who could not give sufficient proof of their divine appointment. Thus the positive institutions of our religion become a standing monument and record of its historical truth to the most illiterate, as well as the learned, in all ages; and if the more ignorant among us do not generally found their belief on this kind of evidence, it is not because the evidence is either obscure or weak, but the people are inattentive to it, and fix their faith without it.

Dech. These are far-fetched and very foreign evidences for the bulk of mankind to depend on.

Shep. They are fetched no farther, than from Christianity itself, and every day's observation. But, besides these, they have other reasons more internal, and drawn from the Scriptures themselves, for believing that they come from God. The knowledge of their own infirmities and corruptions convinces them, that they want divine assistance, in order to their living good and happy lives. They believe God is too good to leave them utterly destitute of such assistance; and they are sensible, there is no provision made for it, but in the Scripture. It is from thence alone, that all the assurances they have of a judgment to come, of glorious rewards for virtue, and dreadful punishments for vice, of God's omnipresence and omniscience, and of the means of reconciliation with him after having sinned, are drawn by them. They are sensible they could not have known these things without a revelation; that, if God was pleased to grant the world such a revelation, he would and could provide, that it should be handed pure and uncorrupted to them; and that all the commands, informations, and institutions contained in it, are agreeable to reason, and the nature and wants of man, as well as worthy of his infinite wisdom and goodness, from whom they believe it to proceed. They find, that in proportion as they themselves, or others of their acquaintances, are careful or negligent, to place the grand in-

ducements to holiness, contained in the Scriptures, before their eyes, to adhere to its ordinances, and regulate their actions by its precepts, they in the very same proportion rise to a life of purity and goodness, or sink into corruption and sin.

Dech. Yet, after all you have said, you must own the ignorant cannot possibly attain to the same degree of evidence, concerning the Scriptures, with the knowing; and yet reason would tell one, that they ought to be on a level with the learned in a matter of this nature.

Shep. I will readily acknowledge they have not the same, or so great means of conviction; but then they can believe as strongly upon those they have. They do not labour under so many and heavy biasses and obstacles to faith, as the great ones, who have opportunities of higher knowledge; and one who is under fewer hindrances to conviction, receives it upon lower evidence, and yet is as thoroughly convinced. You reason with two persons upon any point; the one is under no disinclination to be convinced, and is brought over to you by your first or second argument; whereas, if the point you are pressing, should happen to run against the pleasure or profit of the other, you must multiply arguments; you must urge them with the greatest force and clearness; and, after all, it is odds, but you leave him only half a convert to your sentiments. When the whole evidence, which a knowing and considerate person may have for the Christian religion, is laid all together, it appears to be vastly greater, than is necessary for the conviction of a candid mind; and is intended partly to draw the assent of such, as are most incredulous, or most unwilling to believe, and partly to silence the most obstinate and artful adversary. The rest of our Saviour's disciples as firmly believed in the resurrection of their Master, though they trusted their faith only to their eyes and ears, as Thomas, who, not satisfied with the testimony of those senses, demanded that of his feeling also. He who distinguishes a man from a horse, or a tree, by twilight, is as far from being mistaken, as he who does it at noon-day, though the latter hath more light. They, indeed, who are naturally dim-sighted, or who would examine more minutely, whether the man, already distinguished from other objects, hath a fair or tawny complexion, dark or blue eyes, &c. must have a

better light, and take a nearer view, than he who only wants to know, whether what he sees is a man or not. In like manner, an illiterate person hath light enough to distinguish the truth of the Christian religion from the falsehood of other religions, and clearly to apprehend its main and necessary doctrines, though not to direct him in nice and difficult inquiries about it, which he is little, or not at all, concerned in.

Dech. If the illiterate may be Christians, it must be on some other footing, than that of reason; and this will make Christianity, howsoever true and excellent in itself, an irrational religion to them. From hence we must conclude, either that Christianity is in itself defective, or that, if the vulgar can have no other religion, God hath not thought their virtue and happiness worth providing for.

Shep. I have already proved, that the most illiterate person may have sufficient reasons for being a Christian, although not so many reasons as the learned. The ignorant, however, having less opportunity of religious knowledge, than their betters, are determined by the nature of things, in some measure, to be led therein by those before them; who are therefore accountable for the goodness of their apparent principles, to their poor ignorant inferiors, as well as for that of their real principles, to their own consciences and souls. The common people all know they have a king and a parliament, who make their laws; but, as to what you, or any other lawyer, tells them is contained in a statute, they have only your word for it, that either his majesty, or the parliament, ever enacted any such thing; and yet, such is the nature and necessity of things, they must pin their faith upon your sleeves, and with it their properties, their liberties, their lives. Now you are at least as much tempted to be swayed by interest in dictating, or explaining the law, as any clergyman can be in respect to the gospel. Ignorant people may have an implicit faith in that which is right, as well as that which is wrong; and, if in most things, such as law, physic, surveying of land, religion, &c. in which they are deeply concerned, the necessity of things is such, that they must partly rely on the judgment and integrity of others, it is certainly the duty of those, who are raised above them by education and knowledge, and set over them by fortune

or function, to take care they are not implicitly led into unhappy and fatal mistakes. We of this company have been blessed with happy means of information, and are obliged, under all the ties of religion and humanity, to improve those opportunities to the best advantage, that we may from thence derive, among our ignorant neighbours and acquaintances, the wholesome seeds of profitable knowledge. The vulgar are accountable to God for no more than they have means of knowing. We are accountable in the same manner for our means; and as we can easily gather more knowledge, than is necessary for our own purposes, we are not to imagine, that our whole lives are to be spent in reading and inquiring; but that, as the wealthy are stewards for the poor, so we should be treasurers for the ignorant. We owe a great deal this way to the world; and it would be injustice and cruelty to withhold it. It would be still infinitely worse, it would be a thing shocking to nature, and monstrous in the sight of God, should we, in obedience to our lusts, or the love of the world, suck in pernicious principles, and then take a pleasure in sowing them among our illiterate acquaintances, who may want knowledge sufficient to defend themselves against them.

Cunn. I think it does almost as great dishonour to Christianity to suppose its evidence, in any measure, unapparent to the vulgar, as to suppose it unconvincing to the learned and judicious.

Shep. Some part of the evidence for Christianity may be unknown to the illiterate, without detriment of the reasonableness of their faith, if the evidence they may have is sufficient. But I own it is necessary they should be instructed in the principles of Christianity by others more knowing than themselves; and so they are liable to error through wrong instructions, and to corruption by bad examples. The ignorant are therefore compared, in Scripture, to flocks of sheep, weak, simple, liable to be misled and injured; and those who are set over them, to shepherds, who are to feed them with wholesome knowledge, to guide them in safe ways, to be extremely tender of them, and, at last, to account to their great owner for their care of his precious charge, for whose sakes chiefly they were made great either in knowledge or power. I, as a clergyman, often tremble,

when I consider what I am to answer for; when I reflect, how many souls depend on me, in some measure, for religious knowledge; and you, gentlemen, who are placed over so many people, ought to be well aware, that they will judge of your principles by your actions, and by your discourses, perhaps when you are most light and careless; that they will be apt to give into your supposed principles, and imitate all they see you do. It is the office of the poorer and lower class of mankind to supply the whole world with the necessaries of life. It cannot be expected of such people, that they should know much of any thing but the one they are employed about, which takes up all their time. Labour exhausts their spirits, stiffens their nerves, and makes them stupid. Reading and disputing therefore, and such like means of knowledge, they are strangers to; and would know little or nothing of religion, were it not, that they are called off their labour, once a week, to be instructed in it by God's word, and his ministers. Persons educated and instructed, both lay and clerical, are set as lights and guides to the ignorant; and are therefore called in Homer, as well as in the Scriptures, the 'shepherds of the people.' The working man is as feet to all the upper classes of mankind. He is next the ground, and supports the whole. Those who stand highest in the world, and can see farthest before them, should do the office of heads and eyes of those, who bear them up, and lift them so high; and if they should lead them, or even suffer them to stray among pits and precipices, they themselves must get a fall for their ingratitude and cruelty; because, if the people, for want of necessary cultivation, grow barbarous and wicked, they will soon too grow averse to honest labour, to agriculture and arts, and betake themselves to rebellion and rapine.

Dech. You observe very justly, concerning the common people, that they have neither leisure nor ability to read and dispute; and from thence I think it is plain, that they can have nothing to say to a learned religion.

Shep. And pray, how much better, when they are left to themselves, do they understand what you call natural religion? Is it possible for the wildest imagination, even though you suppose it possessed and ridden by a demon, to contrive a more monstrous, a more absurd, or wicked set of notions,

than have been received for true religion in all the ages and nations of the earth, that have not had the benefit of revelation? How could unassisted reason, so magnified by libertines, contrive such hideous schemes of superstition; or, if they had been contrived by priestcraft or power, how could reason have either swallowed them itself, and argued for them, or permitted them to take a full possession of the politest nations in the world? The most ignorant Christian knows more of God, of true religion, and of moral obligations, than the most knowing Pagan that ever lived. A modern philosopher would turn a downright adorer of Plato or Cicero, should he find such a lecture in either of them concerning the unity, the omnipresence, the omniscience, the justice, mercy, and power of God, concerning the creation of the world, the degeneracy and corruption of human nature, and the means of its recovery, as a poor tradesman or farmer delivers to his children on a Sunday evening.

Dech. What such persons prate to their children about those matters, I know not; nor do I believe they borrow their ideas of God and morality from mere tradition or learning. God, indeed, hath not left them trusting to it, but implanted in their own breasts a natural and obvious religion. But as we have already discoursed more opportunely on this topic, under the first and second heads of our creed, I shall say nothing more about it now. And here I think it proper to tell you, in answer to your long harangue about the duty of instructing the people, that the Deists, with a noble and disinterested compassion, are labouring hard to rescue the people from false teachers and superstition, to deliver them from expensive and oppressive errors, that, when their minds are cleared of rubbish, the great instructor within may have free and open ground to build and plant in. But I must observe to you, that as your religion took possession of the ignorant and stupid first, and then preposterously, and directly against the process you have been so pathetically recommending, sent those ignorants to instruct their betters, ours, which begins with the great, the polite, and knowing, I hope in a little time will reach the people.

But you talked, a while ago, concerning the inward marks of truth, by which the ignorant might distinguish the religion of the Bible from false religions; and I might here put

you in mind, that this argument of yours betrays your whole cause. How can those, who have not already a right idea of God, judge whether any religion proposed to them is worthy of God, and fit to come from him? If the people have from nature and reason a right notion of God, they need no other religion; and if they have not, they can be no judges of the fitness or truth of any religion revealed to them. This is a dilemma, which I defy the ingenuity of the greatest religious artist upon earth to extricate himself from; and the difficulty upon you in this respect will be greater than upon another, who never made the vulgar a judge of the internal marks of truth or falsehood in any religion.

Shep. Now I think there will be no difficulty at all in the business. Pray, sir, may not God reveal himself to a person who had no idea of him before?

Dech. I believe he may.

Shep. And may he not by that revelation communicate a right idea of himself to the aforesaid person?

Dech. He may.

Shep. And, when he hath done this, may he not very naturally and easily proceed to reveal his will in all necessary points, so plainly and fully, that the person mentioned can have no doubt, either that the revelation comes from God, or that it is worthy of him?

Temp. I think this is very easily conceived, and wholly removes the difficulty.

Shep. If a person who hath good eyes, but hath hitherto been kept in the dark, were suddenly removed into the open daylight, would he not see very well about him as soon as the first dazzle was over?

Dech. Yes, surely.

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, do you understand geometry?

Dech. A little.

Shep. Did you understand it before you learned it?

Dech. That is a very sensible question.

Shep. Did you understand the principles of it before your master began to instruct you?

Dech. No, sir.

Shep. I do not see, then, how it was possible for him, upon your way of thinking, to reveal this science to you.

Dech. Why, sir, he taught me the definitions and prin-

ciples first; then he laid the problems before me, and afterward shewed me how to work out the solutions; but it was my own natural talents, all the while, that enabled me to apprehend both the principles and the deductions.

Shep. In like manner the natural talents of man can apprehend a right notion of God, when revealed to him; and, although he was ignorant of that notion before, can tell him it is rational and right. Now, a rational creature, having thus received a right notion of God, may afterward judge very well, whether any religion, pretending to come from God, is in itself reasonable, and worthy of God. As to any revelation which a man receives immediately from God, the person so favoured, if he is fully satisfied the revelation comes from God, hath no room afterward to doubt of its fitness or worthiness.

Temp. Nothing can be more natural or manifest than this short process. It is easy and obvious.

Shep. Yes; for it is that by which all men are taught religion: and were not reason imperfect or corrupted, or biassed by prejudices, no man could be taught a false religion.

Dech. Right reason, then, at least, is to judge, whether any revelation, proposed to us at second or third hand, is worthy of God for its author.

Shep. It is.

Dech. And we are to admit of no revelation, unless God immediately proposes it to us, till we have examined it by reason, and found it rational and fit.

Shep. So I think.

Dech. Shall we then try the Christian religion by this touchstone, and see whether it does not contain such marks of unfitness as ought to determine a rational man to reject it?

Shep. With all my heart.

Dech. There are, I think, two sorts of fitness that ought to be found in the true religion; the first in respect to its author, and the second in respect to its end.

Shep. You clearly conceive the matter.

Dech. Remember this, that when we meet to-morrow, we may resume it as a maxim, and save ourselves the trouble of repeating any part of what hath been said, in order to arrive at it.

Shep. I will.

DIALOGUE VI.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Dech. We laid it down, yesterday, as a sure and incontestable maxim, that right reason ought to determine in every man, whether a revelation, not proposed to him immediately by Almighty God, is worthy of so good an author; and that there are two sorts of witnesses that ought to recommend the right religion to us, and without which we cannot, as rational beings, receive it; the first relating to him who gives it, and the second relating to its end, or the good of those to whom it is given.

Shep. This we agree in.

Dech. In the first place, then, I will farther lay it down as a maxim (for I believe nobody will dispute it), that God needs neither honour nor obedience from his creatures, as he is infinitely perfect and happy in himself; and that he neither created any beings for his own sake, nor governs them with any view, but to their good.

Shep. Although God was moved by his own goodness, and certainly took pleasure therein, to bestow being on his creatures, when as yet there was none of them; and may be more justly said to have had that goodness, than creatures not yet in being, for the object or end of the creation; yet, as I think it too bold in man to determine and pronounce about the views of Divine Providence in its incomprehensible operations, which, in respect to the time and manner of the creation, are full of unfathomable mysteries, so I choose to let you make what use you can of your daring maxim, rather than be obliged to run into the like presumption, by disputing a point so much above the reach of human understanding.

Dech. As God is not an arbitrary being; as he can be no way affected by the good or evil actions of his creatures; as all he does in respect to them, is for their good alone; so we must conclude, that he could never give them any laws but what are for their good: and, as they are free and rational beings, it is absolutely necessary they should be sensible of the good intended them by any of his laws. The best footing on which the duty of mankind can be put, and

indeed the only rational and generous footing, is to convince them that he is infinitely disinterested and good; that, in all he does, he seeks their happiness and comfort; that he is not, like earthly princes, jealous of his honour, nor dependent, for any part of his satisfaction, on the applauses or services of subjects so infinitely beneath him; and that anger, and wrath, and fury, passions blasphemously ascribed to him in Scripture, are storms that rage only below among the creatures, and never rise to disturb the eternal calm of a nature infinitely sublime. Such a notion of God would fill us with love for him, and consequently produce a rational and voluntary obedience. Now, the positive duties of revealed religion being things in themselves indifferent, we can never suppose that God, who does nothing out of mere will and arbitrariness, which are never found apart from caprice and unsteadiness, could lay so useless and senseless a burden on his rational creatures. It is from the same idea of God, that we may be sure he will never punish the violation of his laws, but so as to promote the main of human happiness; nay, and the happiness even of him who suffers for such a violation.

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, is God the Governor as well as Creator of the world?

Dech. He is.

Shep. Have mankind chosen him for their Governor, and prescribed him rules and laws to govern by?

Dech. No, his right to govern is that of a Creator; and the law he governs by is the eternal law of reason.

Shep. He then, in bringing us into being, hath made us his subjects.

Dech. He hath.

Shep. And, being infinitely wise, knows best what means to employ in the management of his great dominion.

Dech. Yes, surely.

Shep. Is he also a just Governor?

Dech. He is infinitely just.

Shep. As he rules over all things in heaven and earth, and through all the worlds that adorn the far distant regions of infinite space, his government, and the preservation of it in due order and harmony, must be matters of great importance.

Dech. Of infinite consequence and importance.

Shep. The laws, then, of so wise a Governor must, in all respects, be equal to the great ends they are to answer; and their sanctions, in particular, must bear proportion to those ends.

Dech. They must.

Shep. And to the majesty of the Legislator.

Dech. Yes.

Shep. We have now seen, that God governs by right of creation; and, consequently, is an unlimited and uncontrollable Ruler: we have likewise seen, that he is infinitely wise, and, consequently, knows many excellent means and instruments of government, the use and efficacy of which we are unacquainted with. Farther, we are agreed, that he is infinitely just, as well as wise; that, in consequence of both, his laws must be adequate to the infinitely important ends of a boundless empire; and that their sanctions in particular, from whence springs the force and efficacy of all laws, must be such as are sufficient to render those laws respected in that degree which is necessary, in regard to the majesty of their Author, and the good of an empire so comprehensive. Now, although the power of God over us is infinite and unlimited, and he hath a just right to govern us as he pleases; yet he manifests a voluntary goodness, compelled by no rights of ours, in entering into a kind of compact with us, in fixing between himself and us that relation which subsists between a royal lawgiver and his subjects; and governs us by those laws, the reasonableness of which he had made to result from the nature he had given us, and the situation he had placed us in. Thus God, having condescended to govern the world, is, in that capacity at least, concerned to see, that his laws be duly enforced and obeyed. Howsoever indifferent the Deists may suppose him to be, as God, in reference to all our actions; yet as an equitable, nay, as a gracious governor, he may be either honoured or slighted, pleased or offended, by the behaviour of his subjects, although their best actions may not add to his happiness, nor their worst detract from it, in the least. An earthly prince is but little removed or exalted above his subjects, and yet he can approve the behaviour of the lowest subject, as loyal and respectful, without any sensible addition to his happi-

ness, and condemn the contumacy of another, who is, nevertheless, too inconsiderable to give him the smallest disquiet.

Dech. But the Scriptures represent God as disturbed by the most violent passions, upon the misbehaviour of his subjects.

Shep. When God is represented to us in Scripture as jealous of his honour, and angry with the sins of men, &c. or in any other respect figured to us as a man; it is only because neither he himself, nor his approbation of virtue, nor aversion to vice, could be otherwise made intelligible, or affecting to us. Tindal, after drawing an argument against the Scriptures from these sort of expressions, as conveying unworthy notions of God, cannot help falling into the like himself. He tells us what will please, displease, honour, or affront Almighty God. Man is made in the image of God, and it is only by that resemblance between him and us, that we can have any notion of him at all; and therefore, when he is to speak to us, as it must be in terms, and by the help of notions, intelligible to us, it is impossible to contrive any other way than that of metaphor and analogy. Whatever judgment or sentence it is that God forms upon the good actions of men, it cannot be otherwise expressed to us, than by approbation, nor strongly expressed, but by pleasure and delight. Whatever it is he thinks of sin, we faintly express it by dislike, and strongly by anger and indignation; but the cavils on this head are perfectly childish, and unworthy of an answer: God, as governor of all intelligent beings, is pleased (and it is an effect of the greatest goodness) so to act, as if the obedience of men gave him pleasure, and their disobedience offence; that is, he cherishes and rewards the good, and punishes the evil; and the latter is no less an instance of his tenderness for mankind, than the former: for as the rewards of virtue prompt us to be just and beneficent to all men, so the punishments of vice deter us from iniquity and cruelty: and if we may be allowed to judge, in this matter, by experience, the latter is of more efficacy in governing the world than the former. There is no comparison between the number of those who aspire to, and deserve a reward, and that of those who dread and deserve punishment: it is not difficult to determine what the greatness of those rewards and punishments should be that are to

support the laws of an Almighty God and Judge, and thereby preserve the universe from ruin and misery. We have already agreed, that they ought to bear an exact proportion to the majesty of the lawgiver and governor, and to the importance of the ends proposed by the law. Now both are infinitely great, and therefore the punishments and rewards of this law ought to be infinitely great. But although such rewards seem consonant enough to the justice and goodness of God, yet many think infinite punishments too grievous for the sins of men. You seem, sir, to be of this number, by your saying, as Tindal does, that God, in punishing even the wicked, proposes the good and happiness of him he punishes; which can never be if the punishment is infinite.

Dech. I do insist, that the end of all punishment, human and divine, is not the misery and destruction of the delinquent, but in order to reformation.

Shep. As to human punishments, no doubt you are highly in the right; and he who is hanged is in a fair way of reformation. And as to the laws of God, I am perfectly of your opinion, the last and adequate punishment, annexed to them, is in order only to reformation; but of whom? Not of the offender; for reformation surely cannot be a punishment, let the pain that procures it be what it will. It must be, therefore, the reformation of others, not yet ripe for justice, and the preserving the good in a state of innocence, that a just and gracious God hath in view, when he eternally punishes a hardened offender. The apprehension of such a punishment will most powerfully work on all who are capable of reformation; and as to those who are not, we have already proved, in our fourth conference, that their endless perseverance in wickedness, must unavoidably render the useful example of their punishment eternal. This, and nothing short of this, can give infinite force to a law of infinite importance, and make the very distant thoughts of transgressing it awful and shocking. But let us suppose the matter otherwise, and see what would be the effect. God cannot be angry at all; is in no sense injured or affected by our transgressions; will only punish the vilest delinquents so far, as to make those of them amend their behaviour in another world who die in their sins: I appeal to the hearts of all men, whether this would not wholly defeat the good ends

proposed by the law; and whether such a medicine, substituted in the place of a punishment, would not unchain the outrageous appetites and passions of mankind, and turn the world into a hell of confusion and misery. What a sight would this be for all the other intelligent beings of the creation! To see the evil let loose upon the good, and wretched men, already too prone to wickedness, tempted to become devils by a promise of pardon beforehand! All the laws of wise and just legislators are intended for the suppression of the evil, and the defence and security of the good; but a law, without a penalty equal to the strong tendency to evil in many or most of the subjects, instead of being a defence to good men, would most miserably oppress them. Their respect for the law, and its author, would effectually tie up their hands, while the worst of men with a licence, prompted by hopes of impunity and reconciliation with God, would oppress and plunder, and cut their throats at discretion.

Temp. I remember to have heard a lady, after reading a treatise against the eternity of hell-torments, say, she thought it a pity the lovely doctrine of the author should not be true.

Shep. Yes; such an opinion hath something very soothing in it; and in that consists the danger of giving into it, and the chief argument against it: it was either the retrospect of sin, or the prospect of punishment, probably both, joined with a strong wish for more liberty to gratify her corrupt nature, which drew that loose reflection from her: but of this enough at present. We took occasion to discuss this important topic, I think, sufficiently, when we discoursed concerning the defects of the law of nature.

Dech. Enough; ay, and too much, by the one half, if not by the whole. But the chief point, in my last objection to revelation, you have not touched on at all. You are afraid, I believe, of entering on the subject of positive institutions.

Shep. Not in the least. But as, in my opinion, no subject can be of equal consequence to us with the sanctions of God's laws, which you joined with your objections to positive duties, I thought it proper to make some observations concerning those sanctions, as a means to clear up our notions concerning the Divine Legislator, his authority, and his laws; and those observations will, I hope, lead us to a

right chain of reasoning concerning positive precepts and commands. If God's authority over his rational creatures is absolute, and such as may give him a right to impose laws that are supported with infinite sanctions, it cannot be arbitrariness or tyranny in him to give us positive precepts also, especially if these positive precepts, howsoever indifferent the actions they oblige us to perform may be in themselves, are for our good. Now, whatsoever injunction we are sure is laid upon us by a wise and a gracious God, we are also sure is beneficial to us. It is enough to make the observation of such a precept our duty, if we know or believe that it is the will of God, although the nature of the thing should make it impossible for us to comprehend its use. Children do not always see the useful tendency of their parents' injunctions; nor subjects that of social or civil laws; yet they are, nevertheless, obliged, in duty, to obey: and how much more the subjects and children of God, who cannot err, and who will never act the tyrant over us, as earthly kings and parents often do? You may remember we agreed, a little while ago, that God, being infinitely wise, must be a better judge of the means by which his universal government is to be preserved and regulated, and the great ends of it obtained, than ignorant and fallible men. Now, as laws, resulting immediately from the frame of our nature, are the first means to accomplish those ends; so there may be other secondary means, in the hands of God, which may be employed to excellent purpose in making us more observant of the first, especially as we are a degenerate and fallen race of beings, whom the primary law itself was insufficient to restrain, and to whom, in tract of time, it became almost wholly unknown.

Temp. If secondary laws are to be superadded, as we are rational beings, their use ought, I should think, to be apparent; for, otherwise, they cannot so well answer the end proposed by them.

Shep. A patient often receives benefit from a medicine, although he understands not how it operates; and the physician is not accounted arbitrary for prescribing it, although he does not subjoin a lecture on its qualities, or virtues. But, in case the secondary or positive means are so delivered to us, that we can easily see their use and excellency, I hope

it will be no longer called a mere act of power to enjoin them. Now the use of the three positive duties in the Christian religion is as plain as the duties themselves, than which nothing can be more intelligible. By the first of these we are, once in seven days, called off from all our worldly pursuits and avocations, to commemorate the signal mercies of God to mankind, and inspire us with religious love; while, at the same time, his law is repeated to us, is explained in the most familiar manner by his word, and enforced by the most pathetic exhortations, by the most powerful examples, and by threats and promises of infinite weight. From this short view of the sabbath it may appear, very plainly, that it is of singular use in fixing the law of God, both in the understandings and hearts of his people; and I can hardly think, that if this most excellent positive institution had been duly observed in all ages and nations of the world, mankind could have so generally lost the knowledge of the true God, and departed from his worship and service. The second positive institution of Christianity is baptism, by which a person, polluted with sin, and naturally prone to the committal of it, is, by the figure of external washing, assured of pardon for his sins, and enters into a solemn compact with God, binding him, upon high and valuable considerations, to the faith and practice of a Christian. Such a compact, actually entered into, upon the most glorious promises, on God's part, binds the divine law, in the strictest manner, upon the consciences of Christians, and lays them under an additional obligation of their own choosing, to observe the several necessary precepts of that law. Before this covenant is entered into, men may consider themselves as left at large to the irregular motions of their passions, and the uncertain dictates of a dark and corrupted nature, so that, both in respect to the knowledge of primary duties, and the obligation to perform them, this covenant must be of unspeakable use. The third and last positive institution of Christianity is that of the Eucharist, in which the sufferings and death of Christ are to be commemorated with the gratitude that is due for the highest instance of mercy and goodness that was ever vouchsafed to mankind; and to the right performance of this solemnity, a thorough examination to be made by every man into his life

and conversation, by the rules of God's law, is rendered necessary, and charged home upon his conscience, under the dread of a very terrible penalty. He is made sensible, by the word of God, that it is a necessary duty; and yet is cautioned by the same word, in a very alarming manner, to beware of assisting at it, after having violated the laws of God, without first reducing himself to a proper disposition to observe those laws with greater care for the future, and fortifying that disposition with the firmest resolutions he can put on. These are the ideas all Christians entertain concerning the positive duties of their religion; and, in this light, they cannot be thought either useless to those who are to observe them, or instances of a mere arbitrary disposition in him who imposes them.

Dech. If none are Christians, but those who think in this manner of the Eucharist, this will unchristian some, who have christened many a one. But I should think, sir, that such helps and means, towards the better observation of God's law, as may be drawn from acts and usages in themselves indifferent, would be more prudently left to the contrivance and application of men, than that God should interfere in such matters; because, as his commands must be obeyed, if he should enjoin that which is in itself indifferent, it would then become necessary; and God will not change the nature of things, which depends upon an eternal fitness. Besides, to make that necessary which was before indifferent, is to take off the minds of men from real, natural, and indispensable duties, and tempt them to put their trust in mere rules and ceremonies, easily performed, and of no intrinsic utility to mankind.

Shep. You seem to think God stands mightily in awe of the nature of things, although he made them what they are, and could have made them otherwise, if he had pleased: their natures and fitnesses depended absolutely on his will. He gave substance, and form, and fitness, to all things, according to his own will and pleasure; and may destroy and change them as he thinks proper: and as he made the things, so he gave the laws by which they are to be preserved in due order; nor were the laws less dependent on his will, than the being and nature of those who were to observe them: so that, in respect to God, those laws which

you are pleased to style eternal and indispensable, are merely positive and arbitrary. Of this enough was said on a former occasion.

Dech. I still think the laws of nature eternal, and independent on the will of God; and that, if any use could be made of mere indifferent ceremonies in religion, it would be beneath the majesty of God to interfere in such matters: he would leave that inferior office to the appointment of men.

Shep. If God, by a positive institution, should greatly add to the evidence and obligation of all rational duties, would not such a work be worthy of him?

Dech. Ay, if—But what if they be clear and strong enough already?

Shep. Then, indeed, there would be no occasion for additional helps: but we see some few men, since the creation, have been ignorant of some useful truths: and the ties of nature have not been sufficient to withhold men from such actions, as it were to be wished they had let alone.

Dech. And this may be said, with great truth, of some few Christians too.

Shep. It may: but, both with respect to knowledge and practice, I hope it will appear, that Christians draw great advantages from their religion, and particularly, from the positive part of it. If the mere want of positive duties, in religion, should chance to cut your throat or mine; we would wish, at the first sensation of the knife, that something more had been done, than mere nature could do, to make the murderer a honest and good natured man.

Dech. And pray, how could a positive institution have done that, which the eternal ties of nature were not sufficient to do?

Shep. The eternal ties! why, the cut-throat never considered any tie, but that of the halter, and even the terror of that was not sufficient. If such an accident, however, should really happen to you, as it possibly may, and your ghost should have leave to make a holiday, and go see the execution of him, who shot you on the high-road, or smothered you in your bed; you would, perhaps, be shocked to hear him say, that, when he was very young, he waited on a fine gentleman, who frequently declaimed at table against

positive duties, gamed himself, and made his servants work on Sundays; and that he, believing the gentleman, who was very sharp-sighted and judicious, knew more of that matter than the parson, or plain folks, could be supposed to do, never troubled himself about going to church, or reading, meditating, and praying, on Sundays; that, by these means, he lost all the opportunities of being instructed, like other people, in his duty, and of being either exhorted to what was good, or dissuaded from what was evil; and so betook himself, first, to an idle, and then to a vicious course of life; which, as he had no lands to rack, nor tenants to oppress, he was forced to cater for upon the high road. This, perhaps, would shock your soul, conscious to itself, that your declamations against positive duties might possibly have given occasion to the like enormities.

Dech. People of good manners always reason without shocking; and that argument, which is disagreeably introduced to the mind, being heard with aversion and reluctance, seldom convinces.

Shep. Truth, it seems, is shocking to some people, if it comes naked to them; and men may be allowed to settle such modes of behaviour, and ceremonies of conversation, as shall be prejudicial to truth, though God shall not be permitted to establish ceremonies of religion, that may be highly serviceable to it. Men, who are, in a great measure, ignorant both of themselves, and the tendency of many actions, know how to make great use of resolutions and vows to do, or abstain from, certain actions, in themselves indifferent. For example; a man resolves, and solemnly promises his wife, never to keep company with a certain neighbour: now although keeping company with this or that person is, in itself, a thing indifferent; yet, as long as the aforesaid man keeps his promise, which is purely positive, he avoids a strong temptation to drunkenness, which the conversation of his neighbour threw in his way. If, therefore, a man can see so far, and turn a perfectly indifferent action so greatly to his own advantage, we may be sure an all-knowing God, who adds divine authority to whatsoever he orders, can better choose and enforce such means. Iron is, by its own nature, no way qualified to cure the toothache; but, when made into a pullikin, becomes an instru-

ment of great efficacy against that violent pain. A shrewd old farmer left his lands to his eldest son, on this condition, that the young man should every day of his life say his prayers, a little before sunrising, at a certain bush, that grew on the top of a high hill near his house; and in case he should once fail of so doing, he willed his farm to a younger son.

Dech. A wise sort of a will, no doubt!

Shep. This injunction, however, of the old farmer, was purely positive. It could, in itself, neither gratify the old man, nor serve his son. But, then, you must understand, the farmer knew his eldest son to be a little indolent in his temper, a lover of sleep, and fond of his bed in the morning: he knew, also, that from the bush, on the top of the hill, he could have a prospect of his whole concern; and could from thence examine, whether all things were as they should be; whether his cattle were grazing in their proper pastures, or had broken into his corn; whether his fences were in good order, and his servants and labourers preparing for the business of the day. This apologue may serve to shew, that actions, indifferent in themselves, can be applied to good purpose, in reminding us of, or prompting us to others, productive, by their own nature, of our real good. The happiness of ourselves and others, and the glory of God, constitute the great end, at which all our actions ought to be aimed, as the means of attaining that end; and as soon as any action appears conducive thereunto, whether by nature or institution, it becomes our duty or interest to perform it. Let me now, sir, put you in mind, at the close of our reasonings on this head, that all those nations, to whom the light of true revelation did not extend, have, instead of contenting themselves with what you call the perfect law of nature, contrived, or, at least, admitted, an endless variety of positive rites and ceremonies, all of them absurd, and superstitious to the last degree, and most of them shockingly corrupt and wicked; tending to authorize, by the supposition of a divine authority, the vilest and most abominable practices, tending to debauch the minds of men, and discipline them to vices of the grossest nature: witness those of Bacchus, Venus, Adonis, &c. The experience of all ages since the creation shews us, that reason, with all

the refinements of philosophy, was unable to reform these horrible abuses: as it is also plain, from experience, that mankind must have outward rites, of some sort or other, to fix their attention, and give, as it were, a visible body to religion, I think those of God's appointment are the only preservatives against such as the superstition, or corruption, or craft of man may contrive, and find means to establish in the world. Thus, sir, having, I think, clearly made out, that positive institutions may be of great use, as means and helps towards the increase of necessary knowledge, and the performance of duties in themselves expedient; and that the positive duties of the Christian religion are apparently conducive, in a high degree, towards those ends; since the general doctrine, on this head, is sufficiently established, I hope I need not lose time in shewing, that the prohibition given to our first parents, in respect to the eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, together with the positive injunctions of the Jewish law, may be easily accounted for by the same principles and reasonings. God hath certainly a right to lay on his creatures and subjects what commands he pleases; his infinite wisdom can go much farther, in contriving expedients and helps to duty, than human penetration can follow in accounting for them; and his goodness is such, that we have as great reason to resign ourselves cheerfully to the dispensations of that attribute, as dutifully to those of his justice and power.

Temp. An examination into the positive duties, given to mankind before our Saviour's coming, would draw us out into too great a length, and hinder an inquiry concerning points more within the power of reason to account for, and, perhaps, more necessary to be known. In the mean time, as my conviction is, perhaps, in a good measure, kindly intended by you both, in the management of this debate; I think I ought to declare my sentiments between you, as often as I find them settled to my entire satisfaction. As to the subject, then, of our last inquiry, I believe God to be an absolute, but not, in the common acceptation of the word, an arbitrary being: I believe he hath a right to deal by all his creatures as he thinks proper; and herein does his goodness, in my opinion, manifest itself towards us, that while he is compelled by no superior power, nor obliged

by a coercive or penal law, to give us either being, or the means of happiness, he is graciously pleased to bestow both upon us. In consequence of this, mankind must be highly impious and foolish, if they presume to arraign the justice of his injunctions. He hath, certainly, a most absolute and plenary right to prescribe the rules of our duty; and therefore every command, whether natural or positive, nay, although it should be directly against nature, which we know or believe to proceed from him, we are bound in conscience, to obey. If he reverses, or repeals, or dispenses with, his own commands; as he is supremely wise and powerful, an entire resignation of our wills to his is undoubtedly due, on our part: and how far the prodigious changes (to which an empire, consisting of free and fallible beings, may be subject) shall at any time render a reversal or dispensation of God's laws, or an addition to them, expedient, we are utterly unable to determine; and therefore must leave that matter to the incomprehensible schemes of divine wisdom. Should God, on any occasion, change his commands, which he must surely have a more unquestionable right to do than any earthly legislator; it would not argue arbitrariness nor fickleness in him, according to the mere assertion of Lord Shaftsbury, echoed by Dr. Tindal: because, even upon the principles of the Deists themselves, he is esteemed a foolish or bad man, who does not act according to the circumstances he is in, and change his conduct as his situation varies. So God, if he were obliged to act by the same law as they say he is, would most grossly transgress that law, did he persevere precisely in the same measures with an innocent, a sinful, and a repenting world.

Dech. Pr'ythee, Templeton, consider, that if you leap so plump into all the parson's sentiments, he will believe you are only bantering him. He heard, before he saw you, that you were beginning to think freely: and now that he finds you suffer him to slip the bridle so quietly over your ears, and mount you, he will be apprehensive it is only in order to take some freakish fling, and throw him in the dirt. He may assure himself, I know well enough how to make you do it; and I give him fair warning to hold fast, and keep himself firm in his new seat, or the affair of mysteries,

which I am going to touch on, will turn his tame ambler into a very resty jade.

Temp. If thinking freely, and closing with reason, whenever I am so happy as to get a sight on't, which you have often recommended to me in the strongest terms, should open my mind to truth, though in the mouth of a parson, I hope you will not endeavour to frustrate the ingenuous effects of your own repeated advice, by turning me into ridicule merely for reducing it to practice.

Shep. You need not fear it. Mr. Dechaine is fond of humour, and he does not intend to use his raillery, which flows merely from his particular turn of mind, as an obstruction to your freedom of thought. Neither he, nor his cause, stand in need of jests or artifice, or any aids, foreign to reason. Besides, a little humour now and then helps to enliven a conversation of this kind, and hinders it from degenerating into a dry dispute; to which, from the nature of the subject, it is perhaps a little too inclinable. But I long to enter upon the subject of mysteries, because the gentleman seems to promise something uncommon upon that topic.

Dech. A religion, as we have already observed, that really comes from God, can never be supposed to enjoin the belief of absurdities, impossibilities, or contradictions. If we know any thing of God, we must know, that nothing but truth and reason can proceed from a Being infinitely wise; and that he is too good to put the salvation of his creatures on a faith in such doctrines, as shock that reason which he hath implanted in the minds of men, to be their monitor and adviser, in respect to every thing that is proposed to their understandings. Were a proposition ever so true, or consistent in itself, if, however, it were such, as must appear absurd or contradictory to the reason of all men, God would never require the belief of it from any person, much less from all the world. But that which is highly derogatory to God, and utterly impossible in itself, it is downright blasphemy to say, God could ever affirm it, or ever require the belief of it. To reveal, is the same thing as to explain, or discover; but to reveal a mystery, so as to leave it still a mystery, is a flat contradiction in

terms, and a great solecism; it is an explication that wraps up, and involves, what it pretends to unfold, a discovery that conceals. Besides, if the mysterious points, supposed to be revealed, are purely speculative, and of no effect towards moral practice; such a revelation could be made to no other end, but to try how far mankind could carry their faith, and to set him upon the highest footing of merit, who could most divest himself of reason. To suppose God capable of proceeding thus with his rational creatures, is to make him contradict himself; for, if he tells us one thing by the voice of reason, and the very reverse by that of revelation, if he gives us a natural rule and measure for truth, and then places our duty to himself, in firmly believing that which is directly contrary to that rule, does he not deal very hardly by us? Surely God can never set up opposite standards of truth in the same mind, nor turn belief directly in the teeth of knowledge. He who thinks him capable of this, and would propagate such an idea of him, does him, in my opinion, but little honour.

Cunn. All this I believe Mr. Shepherd, and every other rational man, will readily grant.

Temp. There is no denying it.

Dech. Be assured, Shepherd will not only deny, but refute it all.

Shep. As I see you cannot agree about my sentiments in this matter, what if I should try to express them myself?

Dech. Say on.

Shep. I can subscribe to all you have said but this, that to reveal a mystery, so as to leave it still a mystery, is a contradiction in terms. A truth, which we did not know before, may be revealed to us, without such an explication of that truth, as may enable us to account for the consistency, either of the notions or terms, by which it is conveyed. A negro, for example, who was never out of Guiney, may be told by an European, that the surface of the water in northern countries is often as hard as some kinds of stone; that this is owing to the frost, or cold; and that as soon as the weather becomes warm, the water recovers its fluidity. The negro, who was utterly ignorant of this surprising fact, may easily understand what is said to him concerning it, although he is almost as much in the dark as ever about the

precise meaning of the word frost, or, at least, about the nature of the thing for which it stands. He is told a truth he did not know before; but that truth is nevertheless an incomprehensible and unaccountable mystery to him: nay, it is the same to us too, and was to Newton himself, who beheld the phenomenon with his own eyes. But we interrupted Mr. Dechaine, who was going, I believe, to shew us, that there are certain articles in the Christian faith, which, being absurd or contradictory in themselves, or useless to us, could never, according to the premises he hath laid down, have been recommended to the belief of mankind by that wise Being, who gave us a faculty to defend us against absurd and false opinions concerning himself, and our duty, more especially.

Dech. That is the very thing I was about to do. I might reckon up a good number of tenets, believed by all or most Christians, upon the strength of a supposed revelation from God, which my premises would prove altogether unworthy of such an author; but I shall content myself with two only, because they are esteemed as necessary articles of faith; and because if those two can be justified, the rest, or any thing, though ever so strange and unreasonable, may be justified by the same arguments; I mean the incarnation, and the Trinity. As to the first, it shocks reason with the very sound of it. A God incarnate, a divine man, or a human God, are strange expressions. We laugh at the heathen for giving the Deity so many children, who were gods by the father's, and men by the mother's side. Yet the incarnation of Christ differs not in the least from that of Bacchus and Hercules. God, we all believe, is omnipresent; and, as the Scripture itself saith, dwelleth not in temples made with hands. How then can he dwell in, or be confined to, a human body? If God is equally present everywhere, he dwells in every man, as well as in Christ. We are told in one part of the Scripture, that 'the heaven of heavens cannot contain him;' and yet in another it is said, that he was manifested in the flesh, and dwelt with all the fulness of Deity in Christ Jesus. These matters, Mr. Shepherd, are not only inconceivable, but irreconcilable and contradictory.

Temp. If the Scriptures were to be understood, as most

Christians, and as you here, seem to interpret them, they could hardly be acquitted of gross absurdity and palpable contradiction. But the passages you refer to, and all the rest, usually brought to support the doctrine of the incarnation, may, I hope, admit of a rational, though figurative interpretation, which will not conclude in a doctrine so alien to common sense.

Dech. I told you, Shepherd, I knew how to set Templeton and you together by the ears. You went hand and hand over rocks and mountains, with many a large stride; but we are now come at a gulf, over which poor Templeton cannot leap. Lend him a hand, Shepherd, and try if you and he can agree about the interpretation of Scripture, in this important point. You may remember, you both thought the Scriptures very intelligible a little while ago, in all matters of moment. You and I, Cunningham, have some business to settle in Holland. I believe we may go so far, or even to China, and return time enough to hear of their agreement.

Cunn. I don't know but we might.

Dech. However, I will stay awhile, and see fair play between the two combatants. Although the young man is pretty well equipped for this engagement, yet his adversary is crafty, and may take some advantage of his simplicity. A Deist may make a very good moderator between an orthodox and a Socinian Christian, being far enough, I am sure, from any inclination to either side.

Shep. Well, Mr. Templeton, I am pleased with the footing Mr. Dechaine hath put the examination of this point on, as I believe you will be more sparing of your wit; and, far from triumphing over me before you have subdued me, you will even scorn to do it after. Pray, Mr. Templeton, what is a mystery?

Dech. So; he is at his questions again.

Temp. As I care but little in what sense that word is taken, intending to make no use of it in the present debate, you may define it, if you please, and think it will be of any service to you.

Shep. But, since the Scripture applies the word mystery immediately to the incarnation of Christ, you ought to

know the meaning of the word, as well as I: yet I confess, as I intend to draw some consequences from that meaning, I ought to shew in what sense it is to be understood. We are at present no way concerned with the various senses in which this word is used, either in Scripture, or other ancient originals; but only with that more eminent meaning given to it, when it is applied to the two doctrines under consideration; wherefore in that only I shall define it. A mystery then, in this acceptation, is an article of our faith, which we should never have had the least idea of, if it had not been revealed to us; and now that it is revealed, although we can perfectly well understand the article or proposition, yet we can neither find in that proposition itself, nor from our own reason, nor by any other means, a solution for certain difficulties contained in it, or following from it.

Temp. You have a right to mean by that, or any other word, what you please. But as to words used by an author, if you undertake to give his sense in any passage, you must define the words he expresses himself by in that passage, provided you, and the person you would instruct, or refute, should happen to differ about the sense of those words; and, after giving the definition, it will be farther incumbent on you to shew, that your definition does justice to the author. I desire, therefore, to know the meaning of the word mystery used by St. Paul to Timothy, in this passage, 'Great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh.'

Shep. A mystery, in the scriptural sense, and as the word is there used by St. Paul, is such a proposition as I have defined just now; which man, of himself, could not know, and which, after God hath revealed it to him, he can easily understand, but cannot possibly account for.

Temp. But how does this appear to be the meaning of the word, as used by St. Paul in the passage under consideration?

Shep. I believe you will allow the word mystery always to signify, both in Scripture and common acceptation, something known to few, or, in itself, hard to be understood.

Temp. I will.

Shep. Does not St. Paul in this place speak of something very hard to be understood, when he calls it a great mystery?

Temp. I believe he may; but how does it appear, that he speaks in that place of the incarnation of God?

Shep. He says, 'God was manifested in the flesh;' and that he speaks of this manifestation, as made in the person of Christ, is plain, because he proceeds, and says, 'He,' namely, 'God manifest in the flesh, was justified in the spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up into glory.' Here, sir, it is plain, beyond all contradiction, that he who was justified, seen, preached, believed on, and received up into glory, was Jesus Christ, and at the same time God manifested in the flesh. This was the great mystery, the point impossible to be accounted for, though easily enough understood.

Cunn. Our translators have, in all probability, rendered this passage in a wrong sense, following the manuscripts and comments that favoured the doctrine of the Incarnation; but the Vulgate and Syriac translations, instead of applying, 'was manifested,' to God, apply it to the 'mystery of godliness;' and therefore we may be sure their authors, instead of Θεὸς, must have read ὃ, so that the true rendering ought to be, 'Great is the mystery of godliness; which was manifested in the flesh,' &c.

Shep. But all the Greek copies, except one, and the Greek interpreters, read Θεὸς; and the Arabic version in the Polyglott Bible agrees thereunto. These authorities are vastly superior to that of the two translations you mention. See Pearson on the Creed, in relation to this text, in the second article. But no authorities in this matter can be of any consequence, if they make nonsense of the whole passage. If we are to understand, that the mystery of godliness, or the gospel, was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, and received up into glory, we can conceive nothing more absurd. A mystery incarnate, a mystery justified, or a mystery taken up from the earth into heaven, and there glorified, would be such expressions as common sense can never allow of. What think you, Mr. Templeton? Could the Spirit of God thus express himself?

Temp. I cannot tell what to say to this.

Dech. I am apt to believe you. Did I not often tell you, that, if you received the Bible as the word of God, you must swallow such absurdities as these with a wide throat? Shepherd hath rightly enough defined the word mystery, as used by St. Paul in this place; and it cannot be denied, that St. Paul actually asserts the incarnation of God therein, and hangs a mill-stone about the neck of your faith, which you can never rid yourself of, but by shaking off that faith itself.

Shep. I agree with Mr. Dechaine, that not only the Incarnation, but the Trinity, is so plainly set forth in Scripture, that he who cannot believe them both, is utterly without any relief, but that of disbelieving the Scriptures altogether. The expressions, by which those mysteries are asserted in Scripture, are so many and so strong, that we cannot, by any subtilty of distinction, or violence of interpretation, clear the scriptural writers of either a gross mistake, or a wilful scheme to lead the world into idolatry, if the doctrine of the Incarnation, and of the Trinity, be not founded on truth.

Dech. This, I think, is very evident; and therefore, Mr. Templeton, as the knot is too intricate to be untied, you must either cut it, or pocket it up. It will be in vain to quote those passages of Scripture, where Christ is spoken of as a creature, or a mere man; for Shepherd hath a salvo for all those expressions, and will tell you they are said of Christ, as he is a man; and besides, will be forced to own, that if one passage of Scripture contradicts another in a point of such high importance, it will effectually throw to the ground the whole authority of Scripture.

Shep. That I shall indeed, without any force at all.

Temp. And pray, sir, do you think you can clear the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity, of absurdity and contradiction? Is it possible for you, or all the world, to answer the objections Mr. Dechaine hath brought against those doctrines?

Shep. I think it is a very possible, nay, a very easy matter, to do it.

Temp. You undertake largely, I must say that for you.

Yet hitherto, I own, you have so well supported some very extraordinary positions, that I am not sure you will fail even in this.

Dech. Yes, he is a great undertaker; but every tradesman, you know, speaks largely of what he can perform in the way of his craft.

Shep. Look ye, gentlemen, I do not undertake to refute your objections to your satisfaction. That may be too hard a task; but I think I have reasons sufficient to overturn them.

Temp. Come, then, let us hear them. I can honestly assure you, sir, I have no prejudices against your opinions, nor in favour of Mr. Dechaine's objections. I only look for truth with as honest an affection as any of her more sagacious wooers was ever warmed with towards her; and therefore shall be determined by reason. Of this I have already given Mr. Shepherd some convincing proofs.

Shep. Mr. Dechaine, if I well remember, argued, that absurd, impossible, and useless doctrines could never come from God, nor the belief of them be required of man. This I granted him; but that the doctrine of the Incarnation deserves such epithets, I cannot yet allow. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, is God omnipotent?

Dech. Yes.

Shep. Can he do every thing that does not imply a contradiction?

Dech. Yes, every thing that does not imply a contradiction, either in itself, or to his own nature.

Shep. Is there any contradiction in saying he can join a rational soul to an organized body?

Dech. None at all.

Shep. If he can join a body and a soul together, which are of natures so heterogene and opposite, that they cannot of themselves act upon one another, may he not be able to join two spirits together, which are of natures more similar?

Dech. He may.

Shep. He may then be able, for aught we know to the contrary, to join the soul or spirit of man to himself.

Dech. Not so as to make but one person of both; such an identification I take to be impossible.

Shep. You may take it to be so; but I am sure you can-

not prove it. A thorough knowledge of God, and of a rational soul, is necessary to such a proof, and you know either but very imperfectly.

Dech. But God is omnipresent, and cannot be so joined to a limited soul, as that he shall be confined with it to one body.

Shep. No man ever said he could, and all I insist on is the possibility of a personal union between the divine nature and a human soul. Shew that to be impossible, and I have done.

Dech. Why, if God be present everywhere, he must be in all men; and so the personal identification you speak of, may subsist between him and every man.

Shep. Be pleased to shew, sir, that he cannot be personally united to one man, because he is intimately present to another.

Dech. I cannot tell what you mean by a personal union between the divine and human nature.

Shep. I believe you can't tell how such a union can be brought about, and therein consists all your difficulty; because you cannot conceive the manner, you will not believe the thing. But to say a thing is impossible, because you cannot comprehend how it should be, is the same as to say it is impossible for the fire to warm you, because you cannot tell how it does it. But you said, among other things, that the very sound of such words, as a God incarnate, shocks reason; and in the same breath made mention of Bacchus and Hercules, whom the heathen believed to be gods incarnate. Had reason been so clear in this matter, as you would have us believe, it could never have suffered a notion to gain ground, and possess the minds of so many nations, nay, and of Julian himself, who says, that Jupiter begot Æsculapius out of his own proper substance, and sent him down to Epidaurus to heal the distempers of mankind. Reason did not hinder Spinosa, Blount, and many other modern philosophers, from asserting, that God may have a body; or rather, that the universe, or the matter of the universe, is God. Pray is not reason given us for an universal director?

Dech. It is.

Shep. And does it direct most clearly in matters of the

greatest moment; or does it leave us more in the dark about them, and give us its plainest dictates concerning things of little or no consequence?

Dech. Its dictates are plainest in respect to things of the highest moment to us. God, having given us that for our only director, hath rendered it adequate to the greatest ends for which it was given.

Shep. It follows evidently then, either that it is a thing of no consequence to us whether the incarnation of God be believed or not; or, at least, that reason can see no impossibility in it, since so many nations believed the incarnation of Jupiter himself, whom they took for the supreme God.

Dech. But they did not look upon their Jupiter to be omnipresent.

Shep. That, indeed, is an attribute of the divine nature, which the modern philosophers are beholding to the Scriptures for: yet Plato, and some other ancient philosophers, who sometimes call the Deity Ζεῦς, ascribe omnipresence to him. But surely, if reason could not furnish them with right notions of God, and if, from the wrong notions which it suffered them to entertain of him, they thought it possible for him to have a body, we may from thence draw this conclusion at least, that reason, which, according to you, is our only and perfect guide, especially in matters of the highest moment, was not so sensibly shocked at the notion of an incarnate Deity, as you seem to think; and yet that notion of theirs was attended with very important consequences; and it behoved their unerring guide to have made the impossibility of a divine incarnation evident to every single man of them, upon the first suggestion of it to their thoughts. But, having in vain called only on you to demonstrate to us the impossibility of God's personal union with a man; and having shewn, by an appeal to experience, that reason, instead of being utterly averse to the notion of a divine incarnation, hath easily enough admitted that notion, and suffered it to pass, almost without contradiction, upon the most philosophical nations in the world; I will now endeavour, as briefly as the nature of the thing will permit, to shew, that the incarnation of God, as set forth in the holy Scriptures, is a point of faith not only useful, but essential, to religion. A religion, that does not tell us what will please

or displease God, tells us nothing; and a religion, that can neither bind us firmly to our duty, nor afford us rational hopes of pardon from God, after we have acted against the rules of our duty, is a hideous religion, that serves only for condemnation. All men, who believe there is a God, believe also, that he governs the world with infinite justice, and will punish the sins of men with a severity proportionable, as we have already observed, to the important ends of his law; which are no less than the happiness of all intelligent beings, and the conservation of the whole rational world. Now it was formerly proved, that, as all men are conscious to themselves of many and great transgressions against the law of God, they must be left to the most fearful expectations, to an eternal sense of guilt and despair, if some means of reconciliation with God have not been provided, and made known to them. Give me leave briefly to recapitulate here, what was more fully handled in our fourth conference, when we discussed the subject of atonement; for the considerations there offered are absolutely necessary to clear up the present point. What means God might have made use of for this purpose, we know not; but we know he is infinitely just, and, as such, will inflict an equivalent punishment for the breach of this law. We know also, that he is infinitely compassionate; and, of consequence, as desirous to forgive, as he is just to punish. How then? Shall he punish pursuant to the dictates of his infinite justice? If he does, there is no room for mercy. Shall he listen only to his mercy, and give a universal pardon? If he does, his justice is entirely laid aside, and a universal temptation to sin thrown in the way of all his intelligent creatures by the assurance of a full pardon. His infinite justice and mercy extend alike to all our transgressions; the one pleading for a plenary forgiveness, and the other urging the necessity of an adequate punishment. Here, sir, is a difficulty, which no lights of nature, as I formerly observed to you, nor all the wisdom of the highest angels in heaven, is able to help us over. But the infinite wisdom of God found out an expedient, by which both the justice and mercy of God could be satisfied. The second person in the Holy Trinity being of the same nature with the first, or the Father, and consequently capable of making an atonement of sufficient dig-

nity for the sins of the whole world, took on him the soul and body of a man, and, in our offending nature, suffered a punishment equal, in the sight of his infinitely affectionate Father, to all the penalties annexed to the divine law. Before this mystical plan of our redemption was discovered to us, no force of created wisdom could have pointed out any rational means of our salvation. We were all debtors to the law, and justice must have taken place. The sacrifices of the ancient Jews and Gentiles, having no value in themselves, could never take away sin, any farther than as they were offered up instead of the grand sacrifice expected. Nor could any created being, though of the brightest order, have made an atonement for sins committed by his fellow-creatures against the infinite majesty of God, and those awful and important laws, on the strict observation of which the due order and happiness of the whole rational world depended. But now that this scheme of redemption hath been revealed to us, we are equally struck with astonishment at the wisdom and goodness manifested in it. Man, if he acts up to the terms of reformation, on which this glorious method of reconciliation with God is proposed, hath comfortable hopes afforded him of peace and restoration. Angels and men, who behold this stupendous work of our redemption, more glorious than the most wonderful creation, are filled with infinite love towards its merciful and gracious Author, who grappled with such dreadful agonies, and stooped so low to lift his unhappy creatures from sin and misery. Nor have they less reason to adore and fear the justice of God, and tremble at the heinous nature of sin, when they see that nothing but the blood and death of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God could make atonement for the latter, and satisfy divine vengeance. The man, who reflects but ever so little on the natural effects of such a sight as this, will perceive that nothing can be set before the eyes of men and angels, so likely to fill them with the love and fear of God, and, consequently, to recall them to their duty, or preserve them in it. And thus, sir, I have proved the belief of our Saviour's incarnation to be no unuseful article of our faith; at least, I hope I have proved it to you, Mr. Templeton, who admit, I believe, the other es-

sentials of our religion, with which this of the incarnation hath a necessary coherence.

Temp. By no means. You have founded all you have said upon a personal distinction in the divine nature, which you have not yet proved.

Dech. It is well observed; and I cannot help taking notice, that nothing can be more ridiculous, than to argue from points not yet established, and impossible to be made out, as if they were so many incontestable maxims.

Shep. I own it is so; but you are to blame for that, who threw me into the preposterous method, by proposing your objections to the incarnation before those with which you intend to attack the doctrine of the Trinity: however, it will all come to the same thing in the end, if you cannot shew, that a distinction of persons in the divine nature is impossible or absurd.

Dech. Although I see you are for laying the difficulty of proof always upon me; and whereas it is more incumbent on you to defend your own notions, than on me to shew the impossibility of their truth; yet we have, in this matter, so plain and open a field, that I can safely venture to lead the way.

Shep. I desire no more of you than you undertook of your own accord; namely, to shew that the doctrine of the Trinity, being inconsistent in itself, and with truth, could never have come from God.

Dech. Do you believe there is but one God?

Shep. One only.

Dech. Do you believe he is good, and will deal with his creatures according to the nature he hath given them?

Shep. I believe him to be infinitely good; and that he will never require impossibilities of them.

Dech. Is it not impossible for men to believe a palpable contradiction?

Shep. It is impossible for men to believe a contradiction which they know to be such.

Dech. If, then, there is but one God, there cannot be three persons in the divine nature; for all persons are individual and distinct beings, having each of them a separate consciousness and a distinct will.

Shep. Such persons, as we know, are so distinguished; but can you prove it impossible that there can be two or more distinct persons, who have the same will and consciousness? Or can you demonstrate, that, in the same soul or spirit, there cannot possibly be more than one will, and one consciousness? Or are you able clearly to prove, that, because the personality of a man consists in will or consciousness, there cannot, therefore, be any other sort of personality? In respect of the divine nature, the human is but a faint similitude or shadow, in the faculties and personalities of which, certain attributes, and other distinctions in God, are dimly represented; yet so as to furnish a basis for all that knowledge of God, which is necessary to us in our present condition. When we speak of God, we must use such ideas as the human mind, and such words as human language, afford us. Now man not being of the same, but only of a similar nature with God, we cannot think or speak of God immediately and properly, according to his incomprehensible nature, but only by the analogy of our nature to his: for example, when we say God is wise, we mean he knows all things; but we do not mean that he knows, as man does, by the help of senses and long deductions of reason. So, when we say there are three persons in God, we do not apply the word person in the same proper and immediate sense to him in which we understand it when speaking of men; but we use it as the only term known to us by which the distinction of the divine nature, set forth to us in holy Scripture, can be expressed. In like manner, when we call the first person in Scripture, Father, and the second, Son, we do not mean that the relation between these two persons in God is the same, in all respects, with the relation between a human father and his son; but that the relation between the aforesaid Divine persons, having a greater analogy with that of father and son among men, is better expressed by it, than by any other human relation. Now, sir, it lies upon you to demonstrate, that there cannot be a distinction in the divine nature analogous to that of persons among men.

Dech. Is God omnipresent?

Shep. He is.

Dech. Then it cannot be said of him, in any sense, that

he moves from place to place, or that one part of his nature is here and another there; because he fills infinite space. It follows, therefore, that if the Father be God, and the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God, the Son could not have come from the Father, nor return to the Father; nor could the Holy Ghost have proceeded from both; for this would be the same thing as to say, that God can come from God, and return to, or proceed from God.

Shep. When we speak of God's presence, we mean by it something analogous to our own, of which we have no clear idea; for the presence of a soul in place, which takes up no place, is a thing that cannot be perfectly conceived or explained. Many persons may be all present at once in a room, and any one of them may go from one person to another person, and return again, without ceasing to be present in the said room.

Dech. But none of those persons fills the whole room, much less do they all, or every one of them.

Shep. No; nor can it be properly said that the soul of any one among them, which constitutes his person, fills any part or place of the room; yet it would be a contradiction to common sense to say he is not personally present somewhere, or even to another, who is at some distance from him in the same room. If, then, we cannot have a clear idea of our own presence, but are obliged to express it by a mere analogy to matter and our bodies, which occupy space, how shall we comprehend the presence of God, whose manner of filling infinite space is wholly unknown to us? God may manifest himself in one place more than another, and in different places at different times, which, to make it the more intelligible to us, may be expressed by going from place to place; yet the real nature and manner of his presence cannot be properly either conceived or described by us. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, is God incomprehensible?

Dech. He is.

Shep. Can you, then, demonstrate, from his unity or omnipresence, which you conceive but analogously and imperfectly, that there cannot be such a distinction in his incomprehensible nature, as may be figured and represented to us by the personal distinction of man from man?

Dech. I cannot conceive any manner of distinction in a being so perfectly one, and simple.

Shep. Nor I; but does it follow, that, because we cannot conceive or comprehend the manner of a distinction in one incomprehensible nature, there cannot possibly be any? You will own, I believe, that there is but one soul in a man; are you able to conceive the distinction between the will and judgment of your own soul?

Dech. I can perceive that I judge first, and then will; and here, I think, is a clear distinction.

Shep. That is only between the acts of judging and willing; but can you perceive the distinction between the faculty, by which you judge, and that by which you will?

Dech. I know not whether I have two distinct faculties, or one only, that serves for both purposes.

Shep. Is it possible that you, who know not but there may be such a distinction in one human soul, should not be able to conceive the possibility of some distinction in the nature of God, which you know infinitely less of? Do you know how your soul acts upon your body, or how your body reacts upon, or is moved and affected by, your soul, when soul and matter are, by their own nature, incapable of union or contact, or mutual operation upon each other?

Dech. I cannot tell how far matter may be rarefied and sublimed, nor in what degree a spirit may be condensed, as it were, and rendered tangible.

Shep. Is not matter, though ever so highly rarefied, still matter, as much as steel or adamant?

Dech. It is.

Shep. Is spirit capable of condensation? Or can it be materialised?

Dech. I cannot tell; I believe not.

Shep. Can matter move itself, or is it inert, as the philosophers say; and indifferent to rest or motion?

Dech. It is certainly indifferent to both.

Shep. Is it not still more evident, that it is incapable of freedom and choice? If it cannot move at all, you will readily grant, I believe, that it cannot choose which way it will move.

Dech. That I shall readily grant.

Shep. But you can contract your finger, or stretch it out; can you not?

Dech. Yes; just as I please.

Shep. There must be somewhat, therefore, beside matter, in you.

Dech. Who questions it? It is my soul that moves my finger.

Shep. But the difficulty recurs again; for pure spirit cannot act on matter. These points, however, are too high for us; and man cannot comprehend himself. Let us try the extent of our comprehension in things inferior to us Do you know how that little fly in the window, was generated? How its food nourishes it? How it moves its wings? and what determines each of these seemingly irregular flights it makes from side to side?

Dech. I do not.

Shep. Well, that is an animal, and, consequently, of a nature too high for the comprehension of us, who are but animals ourselves. There is the leaf of a rose; can you tell us how it was unfolded from the bud? How the bud was protruded from the tree? or how the tree itself sprung from a small slip or seed?

Dech. No, indeed.

Shep. A vegetable is a very curious and delicate piece of machinery, and may be too fine and subtile for your understanding; but here is a piece of silver; you can easily tell us, by what power or quality its parts cohere more firmly than those of the rose-leaf I shewed you. It is no difficult matter for you, also, to tell us, how its extension, solidity, whiteness, and other qualities, adhere to its substance; and what that substance is?

Dech. I know nothing of the matter.

Shep. You surprise me! I imagined you, who could tell us, so peremptorily, what there may, and what there may not, be in God, could have given us a clear and perfect account of things so infinitely below him, and which it must be so much easier to comprehend.

Dech. All this is little to the purpose. In ourselves, and things about us, we see many qualities and effects; and though we know nothing of their natures or causes, we

have, by sense and experience, a certainty of the effects themselves: whereas the doctrine of the Trinity is not only unaccountable in itself, but founded, also, on mere report and hearsay; to which we cannot trust as confidently, as to the testimony of our senses.

Shep. This is flying back to the authority of the Scriptures, from whence we learn that doctrine, and not proving the impossibility of a personal distinction in God, from the knowledge of his nature, which is what you undertook to demonstrate.

Dech. But if I prove that doctrine to be contradictory in itself, that, surely, will suffice.

Shep. It will.

Dech. Do not the Scriptures, or the Catholic faith, as you call it, bid you believe that 'the Father is God, and the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God?'

Shep. They do.

Dech. And each of these persons is apart, and by himself, called God. Now I say, no expression can more strongly set forth, that there are three Gods, in direct contradiction to the first article of your own creed, that there is but one God.

Shep. What you say might, perhaps, be true, if that distinction in the divine nature, which makes an article of our faith, and which we express by persons, was precisely the same as that between man and man. But you don't consider what I just now hinted to you; that the first is represented to our minds by a similitude or resemblance to the latter, which resemblance or analogy we are forced to make use of, when we say God is a spirit, and the soul of man a spirit: for whatever difference there is between the divine and human personality, there is the same between the divine and human spirit; yet, be that difference ever so considerable, the analogy between them is such, as to furnish the only ground-work, and that a sufficient one, for all our knowledge of, and reasonings about God. But whatever sense may be forced from the words of our creed, you cannot say, that Christians understand by them, that there are three Gods, since they all maintain, that there is but one. Now I hope, sir, that our present dispute is not about words, but meanings; and, if it is, it must necessarily resolve itself

again into the former question, whether there can possibly be a personal distinction in the unity of the divine nature? The words in which you pretend to discover a contradiction, imply no such thing; if it were said, indeed, that there are three Gods, and yet but one God, this would be a contradiction: or, when it is said that there is one God, and three persons, if the word person were shewn to be synonymous with the word God, and to signify the same thing; then this, also, would be a contradiction: but as every mortal understands one thing by God, and quite another by person; so it is a strange way of speaking to say, that he contradicts himself, who only affirms, there is one God, and three persons. But pray, sir, how are disputes about words to be ended?

Dech. By making those, who use them, define their meaning in other words.

Shep. And is it not the law of speaking, that every one, with whom we converse or dispute, should understand our words in such a sense as we declare we mean by them?

Dech. He hath no right to understand them in any other.

Shep. Therefore, sir, since we expressly declare there is but one God; is it not evident, howsoever imperfectly we express ourselves by the words, on which you charge a contradiction, that we are far from professing a faith in three Gods, by them, or any other words. Upon the whole, it must be owned, there is no contrariety in our meaning, whatever contradiction others may screw our words to.

Temp. These words, you are disputing about, are not to be found in the Scripture, but only in the Athanasian creed; and therefore I think myself but little concerned to know whether they contain a contradiction, or not. Let those look to it, who confess their faith by that creed; they, no doubt, as Mr. Shepherd hath observed, are the properest persons to interpret those words, which they make their own, by so often, and so solemnly, repeating them; and it must be confessed, they all assert the unity of the divine nature in most express terms. As to the doctrine of the Trinity, I must say this, at least, that it is even more amazing than that of the incarnation; yet, prodigious and amazing as it is, such is the incomprehensible nature of God, that I be-

lieve it will be extremely difficult to prove from thence, that it cannot possibly be true. The point seems to be above the reach of reason, and too wide for the grasp of human understanding. However, I have often observed that, in thinking of the eternity and immensity of God; of his remaining from eternity to the production of the first creature, without a world to govern, or a single being to manifest his goodness to; of the motives that determined him to call his creatures into being; why they operated when they did, and not before; of his raising up intelligent beings, whose wickedness and misery he foresaw; of the state in which his relative attributes, justice, bounty, and mercy remained, through an immense space of duration, before he had produced any creatures to exercise them towards; in thinking, I say, of these unfathomable matters, and of his raising so many myriads of spirits, and such prodigious masses of matter, out of nothing, I am lost and astonished, as much as in the contemplation of the Trinity. There is but a small distance, in the scale of beings, between a mite and me: although that which is food to me, is a world to him, we mess, notwitstanding, on the same cheese, breathe the same air, and are generated much in the same manner; yet how incomprehensible must my nature and actions be to him! He can take but a small part of me with his eye at once; and it would be the work of his life to make the tour of my arm; I can eat up his world, immense as it seems to him, at a few meals; he, poor reptile! cannot tell but there may be a thousand distinct beings, or persons, such as mites can conceive, in so great a being as me. By this comparison I find myself vastly capacious and comprehensive, and begin to swell still bigger with pride, and high thoughts; but the moment I lift up my mind to God, between whom and me there is an infinite distance, then I myself become a mite, or something infinitely less; I shrink, almost, into nothing. I can follow him but one or two steps in his lowest and plainest works, till all becomes mystery, and matter of amazement, to me. How, then, shall I comprehend himself? How shall I understand his nature, or account for his actions? In these he plans for a boundless scheme of things, whereas I can see but an inch before me; in that he contains what is infinitely more inconceivable than all the wonders of his creation put together;

and I am plunged in astonishment and blindness, when I attempt to stretch my wretched inch of line along the immensity of his nature. Were my body so large, that I could sweep all the fixed stars, visible from this world in a clear night, and grasp them in the hollow of my hand; and were my soul great and capacious, in proportion to so vast a body; I should, notwithstanding, be infinitely too narrow-minded to conceive his wisdom, when he forms a fly: and how, then, should I think of conceiving himself? No; this is the highest of all impossibilities. His very lowest work checks and represses my vain contemplations, and holds them down at an infinite distance from him. When we think of God in this manner, we can easily conceive it possible, that there may be a Trinity of persons in his nature.

Dech. But, surely, if you thought thus of God, you could not imagine a being, so infinitely great, would humble himself, and, taking on him the nature of man, suffer poverty, and persecution, and the punishment of a slave, for the relief of mites and reptiles; such as we must be, in comparison of him.

Shep. O! sir, consider him in the immensity of his goodness, as well as of his greatness; and this will sufficiently account for that wonderful act of condescension. But I observe, the whole difficulty that lies against your receiving the doctrine of the incarnation, and the Trinity, arises from your measuring God by yourself; you could not stoop to such indignities for the relief of creatures so far beneath you; you could not suffer so patiently for those who persecute and revile you with such bitterness and contempt, and so maliciously aim at your life; and therefore you imagine God could not do it; but he is infinitely gracious and good. There is no insect so small, nor even an atom of matter so minute, as not to share in his attention and care. He feeds the young ravens, he watches over the life of a sparrow, he clothes the lilies; and as to man, who is a being of much greater importance, he numbers the very hairs of his head; and therefore must be supposed to care for his immortal soul, with the tenderness of a most affectionate Father. You, Mr. Dechaine, are unable to demonstrate the impossibility of more than one person in one human soul; and yet such do you conceive the unity of God to be, from your

imperfect idea of your own unity, that you think it impossible there should be more than one person in God. You take the personality of a man to consist in his will, or consciousness; whereas, in this, you are, probably, mistaken. If it consisted in his will, he must become a new person, should he be endued with a new will, which, for ought you or I know, is possible; and if he should fall into absolute idiotism, and have no will, he must then be no person. If his personality consisted in consciousness of ideas, it must suffer a change, as often as he loses any of his former ideas, or acquires new ones; and he must cease to be the person he was, whenever he loses all his former ideas, and gathers a new set. Yet, ignorant as you are of your own, or of personality in general, you venture to say there can be no sort of personality in God, whose nature you allow to be utterly incomprehensible.

Dech. By your way of talking, we must be totally ignorant, both of ourselves and God.

Shep. By no means. We know enough of ourselves, to direct us in our conduct and management of ourselves, although there be secrets within us, which it is as impossible for us to comprehend, as it is for a circle to incompass itself; and I leave it to you, and every rational creature, to consider, whether there may not be secrets and mysteries in the divine nature, which the narrow mind of man can no more comprehend or conceive, than the smallest circle can incompass infinite space. But the vanity of man, in respect to his capacity of knowledge, is prodigious. It was a good observation of Bruyere, that, howsoever dissatisfied a man may be with his portion of riches, power, or other good things; yet every man is contented, and well pleased, with the stock of sense and understanding that Providence hath dispensed to him. The truth, however, is, that God hath dealt out knowledge to us with a frugal hand, and given us only so much of it as is necessary to our occasions; when we pry through the limits prescribed by our wants and accasions, all beyond is a useless field of speculation, covered with uncertainty and darkness. It is enough for us to know, that bread can nourish us; but how it does so, we are neither able, nor concerned, to understand. We know that we ourselves are free, rational, and accountable creatures;

but what the internal frame and nature of the human soul is, from whence freedom and rationality result, it is neither possible, nor useful, for us to know. We know it is God, whom we are to account to for our actions, pursuant to the relation we stand in to him; and we know he is an infinitely gracious Maker, an infinitely wise, just, and powerful, governor and judge, our Father, our Redeemer, and our comforter; made know to us in these three different respects, by a distinct and personal interference with us; so far it is necessary for us to know him. But if we once attempt to advance this practical into a speculative knowledge of him, and to inquire, for example, how it is that his mercy and justice can be both infinite, or how the unity of his nature consists with its personal distinction, we become guilty of the highest folly and presumption.

Dech. But if such points are purely speculative, and above our comprehension, according to your own doctrine; there can be no need of revealing them to us.

Temp. I was going to observe that to Mr. Shepherd.

Shep. To believe that God is infinitely merciful, and infinitely just, and that in him there are three divine persons, are most useful and practical points: but to account for the consistency of those infinite attributes, and of the divine unity and personality, is mere matter of impossible speculation, and bold presumption.

Temp. But you have not yet shewn, that a belief in the Trinity is necessary to the Christian scheme.

Cunn. No; he hath neither proved that, nor shewn that there is any such doctrine set forth in holy Scripture.

Shep. To any ordinary reader of the Scriptures the doctrine of the Trinity appears evidently to be the very foundation and essence of our whole religion; and both to comprehend, and give sense and weight to, all the other Christian doctrines. If God hath not an eternal Son and Spirit, the whole mystical scheme of our redemption by his Son, and of our sanctification by his Spirit, which takes in all the gospel, either immediately, or by necessary consequence, and settles the distinction between it and all other religions, comes to nothing. We read, everywhere throughout the New Testament, of Christ's dying to take away the displeasure of his Father against sinners, of his being sent by his

Father to instruct and reform the world; and all his doctrines, together with those of his apostles, whether relating to faith or practice, derive their authority from the truth and reality of his mission. We read every where of the Holy Ghost's inspiring, comforting, and sanctifying the church of Christ; and are told, on all occasions, that the grace and assistance, imparted by him, are absolutely necessary to a Christian life: we likewise see, in numberless passages, that Christ and the Holy Ghost are personally distinguished from each other, and from the Father; and that the name and attributes of God are expressly ascribed to both. The merit and value of the grand sacrifice offered by Christ arises from the dignity and divinity of his person; and the authority of the Holy Scriptures, depending on our belief that they are the word of God, makes it necessary, also, to believe that the holy Ghost, who dictated them to us, is God. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, don't you think the doctrine of the Trinity is plainly set forth in the New Testament?

Dech. If I had not thought so, it would have been very idle in me to have objected that doctrine to you as a Christian.

Cunn. Be so good, Mr. Shepherd, as to favour us with a few of those texts, in which you conceive the doctrine of the Trinity to be set forth: you say, I think, that it is expressly declared in Scripture.

Shep. I do not say that the word Trinity is to be found in Scripture; but I can easily shew, that the doctrine intimated by that word, is expressly and copiously delivered to us in the New Testament.

Temp. That will be sufficient.

Shep. I believe I need not cite any passages to prove the distinction between Christ and the Holy Ghost, nor between both and the Father.

Cunn. We will allow that distinction to be as great as you please; but prove the divinity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, and their unity in the same nature and essence with the Father.

Shep. In the first of St. John's Gospel, wrote to refute the Corinthians, who denied the divinity of Christ, the Word is expressly called God; and the same Word appears, soon

after, to be no other than Christ, where it is said, that, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.'

Cunn. God, in that place, is to be taken in the same sense as when the angels or kings are called gods. You know it is said, there be gods many; or as Dr. Clarke ingeniously interprets it, in a derivative sense, although intimating in Christ a priority and superiority to all the other creatures of God.

Shep. You will allow, that when it is said, 'the Word was with God;' God there, at least, must be the true and only God.

Cunn. I will.

Shep, We may be sure, then, John would not, in the very same verse, change the sense of the word God, without any warning given of such a change. He could not, if he did, but be sensible his manner of speaking tended to lead his readers into a belief of Christ's divinity; and would never have expressed himself in so unguarded a manner as this, had he believed our Saviour to be a mere creature. But you can give no reason why the word God is to be understood in the proper sense first, and again, immediately after, in an improper and inferior sense. In the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, the Jews ask our Saviour whether he 'be the Christ, the Son of God;' and in the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, when Christ says he is 'the Son of God,' they take up stones to stone him, and say, 'Thou, being a man, makest thyself God.' This, I think, shews, that the Jews commonly expected the Son of God for their Christ, or Messiah; and that they understood our Saviour as taking on him the style of God, by saying, he was 'the Son of God,' and 'that he and his Father were one.'

Cunn. But if Christ knew himself to be God, why did he not expressly assert his divinity, on this occasion?

Shep. He did, in saying, that 'he and his Father were one;' and in saying, 'he was the Son of God,' which he knew the Jews understood in the same sense as if he had said, 'he was God.' In another passage of the same gospel, our Saviour, discoursing with the Jews, takes to himself the incommunicable name of God; 'Before Abraham was, I am:' for which they again take up stones to cast at him.

Cunn. That is, before Abraham was, it was decreed that Christ should come. Christ, by a parity of expression, is called, in the Revelations, 'the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.'

Shep. If you should so construe a sentence of Horace in any school, you would go fair to suffer for it. Christ had said before, that Abraham 'rejoiced to see his day;' and, upon the Jews expressing great surprise at this, he tells them, 'Before Abraham was, I am.' Upon this, the Jews, filled with indignation at his taking upon him the style and name by which the supreme God was, with greatest dignity, distinguished, attempt to stone him; and he leaves them in the full opinion of his having assumed the aforesaid title. St. Thomas, towards the end of this Gospel, after having doubted the testimony of his eyes, as to the reality of our Saviour's resurrection, and tried it by his feeling; breaks out into a strong confession of his conviction: 'My Lord, and my God!'

Cunn. That is only an exclamation. 'O my Lord,' was applied to his master; and 'O my God,' to the Supreme Being.

Shep. Now a plain reader would be apt to think they were both applied to Christ. I am sure, if such a method of interpretation is admitted, any thing, or nothing, may be proved from Scripture. But that St. Thomas did in these very words confess his faith and conviction, and speak to Christ only, is evident, because those words are introduced with these of the sacred historian; 'And Thomas answered and said unto him,' that is, Christ, 'my Lord and my God;' and Christ understanding them as a confession of his faith, saith unto him, 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed.' In the ninth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul, speaking of the Israelites, says, 'that it was of them as concerning the flesh, that Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.'

Cunn. The latter words should be thus translated, 'God be blessed for ever;' and Grotius seems to favour this sense on account of the word Amen subjoined.

Shep. But ours is a literal translation of the Greek words ἐξ ὧν ὁ Χριστὸς τὸ κατὰ σάρκα, ὁ ὢν ἐπὶ πάντων θεὸς εὐλογητὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν. Here is no shadow of an ejacula-

tion, nor the least word, or termination of a word, to favour the putting in of, be, before God. As to the word, Amen, it gives no sort of colour to your interpretation. It is used on other occasions, as well as at the end of a prayer of ejaculation, and is, in its general sense, a confirming particle, signifying verily, or indeed. You know, that whenever our Saviour says, 'Verily, verily,' the original words are 'Amen, amen.' But although I will freely grant you, that ἀμὴν contains in itself a prayer, as used in this passage of St. Paul, and in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, where he says, 'The Pagans worshipped the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever, Amen;' yet neither passage can itself be a prayer; for in both, the apostle only says, that God, and Christ Jesus, whom he expressly calls God, 'are blessed for ever;' and then says, Amen, that is, 'So may it be.' The text of St. Paul, in his first epistle to Timothy, already cited in our discourse about the incarnation, contains an express proof of our Saviour's divinity: 'Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh,' &c. In the same Epistle, Christ is called the 'Lord of lords, and King of kings;' and in the seventeeth of the Apocalypse he hath the very same titles ascribed to him. The incommunicable attributes of God are given in Scripture to Christ. In the first of the Apocalypse he is called the Almighty. In the same chapter he is set forth as eternal, and called the Alpha and Omega. In the sixteenth of St. John's Gospel he is said to be omniscient: 'Now we are sure, that thou knowest all things.' In the third chapter of the same he speaks of himself to Nicodemus, as omnipresent: 'No man hath ascended up into heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man, which is in heaven.' St. Paul, in his first and thirteenth chapters of his Epistle to the Hebrews, ascribes immutability to him in the very words addressed by the psalmist to Almighty God, and, we may be sure, in the same sense and extent; 'Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.' 'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' St. John, in the latter end of his First Epistle, speaking of Jesus Christ, says, 'This is the true God, and eternal life.'

Cunn. This giving the attributes of God to Jesus Christ, is only to be understood in a derivative sense; and is oftener

to be interpreted of the religion of Christ, than of his person, as Dr. Clarke, and many others, have observed.

Shep. Were the apostles capable of such loose expressions in relation to a matter of the greatest consequence? Surely no Christian can suppose it of any ordinary divine. If, however, we can attribute a conduct so careless, or rather disengenuous, to the apostles, shall we charge the same on God's Spirit, who guided the pens of the apostles? It would be endless to cite all the texts of Scripture, in which the divinity of Christ is expressly, or by necessary consequence, asserted; and therefore I pass to those in which the divinity of the Holy Ghost is set forth to us. Those actions that are said in Scripture to be done by God, are also said to be done by the Holy Ghost; and they are such as none but a divine power could perform. We are told in the first of the Acts, that the Holy Ghost spoke the prophecy concerning Judas by the mouth of David, whose inspirations, as well as those of all the other prophets, were from God, who alone is able to instruct in that manner. Again, he is proved to be God, by knowing what none but God could know: 'The things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'

Cunn. Nothing more may be implied in those words, than that he is admitted to higher knowledge of divine things, than men are; which will by no means prove him to be God.

Shep. But he does not know them, as one informed of them, but by consciousness, as the spirit of man knows the things of a man; and, consequently, he must partake of the divine nature as much as the soul of a man does of the human. St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, says, 'Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?' That is a temple which the Deity, to whom it is dedicated, inhabits. If the Spirit of God be not God, how can we be said to be the temples of God, since it is the Spirit only that dwelleth in us? Nothing but the supposed presence of a Deity can make a temple. If the Holy Ghost were a creature, the sin against him could not be unpardonable. We, as creatures, are commanded by our Creator to forgive one another our trespasses, and to pray to God to ratify that forgiveness; whereas we are even forbidden to solicit pardon for sins against the Holy Ghost.

Cunn. It was the extreme malignity of the sin itself, and not its being committed against the Holy Ghost, that rendered it unpardonable; for, had the dignity of his person made the sin unpardonable, a sin against our Saviour must have been unpardonable too, the dignity of his person being, in your own principles, equal.

Shep. This very sin, of ascribing our Saviour's miracles to the devil, was committed against our Saviour, and in derogation of his character; yet it became unpardonable, not because it was committed against Christ, but against the Holy Ghost, that is, because those who were guilty of it, sinned against the highest cause of conviction afforded them by the Spirit of God, and called that Spirit a devil. He is also clearly proved to be God, from his office of governing the church, which consists in guiding us into all truth, in communicating all sorts of religious gifts and graces, in strengthening us against all manner of temptations, in purifying our souls, &c. Now he that can do these things, must be able to search the heart, and know all our wants; he must be omniscient, or it is impossible he should know how to execute such an office; he must be omnipresent, or he could never communicate universal assistance in all places and emergencies; he must be omnipotent, or it will be impossible for him to sway the stubborn heart of a man, nay, of all men, and to provide for the infinite exigencies of his church, with such spiritual aids, as no created power can supply. Now we are told in Scripture, this office belongs to him; and we cannot think he wants any of the divine perfections necessary to it. The miraculous conception of the Son of God, his power to cast out devils, his resurrection from the dead, are all ascribed to the operations of the Holy Spirit. It was he who inspired the apostles with the wonderful gift of tongues, by which they were suddenly enabled to speak all sorts of languages, of which they had never learnt a single word; an effect of divine power, the most amazing that can be imagined! Lastly, the apostle St. Peter calls the prevarication of Ananias 'a lying to God,' which but a moment before he had called 'a lying to the Holy Ghost.' Surely, if St. Peter had not believed the Holy Ghost to be God, he could not have been capable of using such an expression, as must inevitably either have led his

hearers into idolatry, or filled them with abhorrence of him, and his doctrine.

Cunn. "Ananias, by his lying to the apostles, in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt, did in effect lie to the Holy Spirit; and lying to the Holy Spirit was the very same thing as lying to God himself, who dwelt in the apostles by his Holy Spirit. The like manner of speaking is frequent in Scripture, 1 Sam. viii. 7. 'They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me.'"[a]

Shep. This very quotation, although weakly intended for the reverse, serves my purpose extremely well; for if those who rejected the prophet, speaking in the name of God, rejected God himself, they who lied to the apostles, in whom the Spirit of God dwelt, lied to God, because that Spirit is God; they lied not to the apostles, but to God, who was in the apostles, and gave them the words they uttered, and the authority by which they acted. For my part, were I capable of putting this interpretation on the words of St. Peter, I should give him up as an impostor, and could never believe he spoke the dictates of that Spirit about whom we are disputing. But this remark may be justly extended through almost the whole New Testament, because the divinity of our Saviour and the Holy Ghost are every where set forth in such lights and expressions, as make it impossible for us to think otherwise of its authors, than as the vilest impostors that ever lived, if they did not believe each of them to be God. Idolatry is stigmatized both in the Old and New Testament, as the most abominable and damnable sort of sin; and there is the utmost care shewn on all occasions to prevent the world from falling into it. But how inconsistent with that care are the passages I have been citing, if their authors did not believe in the Trinity! Indeed, Mr. Cunningham, we must either believe in the divinity of Christ and the Holy Ghost, or wholly lay aside our Bibles.

Cunn. You know, sir, I only object for argumentation's sake.

Temp. Ah, Mr. Cunningham! was that all?—But pray, Mr. Shepherd, proceed, and give us a few of those passages

[a] See Dr. Clarke's spiritual doctrine of the Trinity on this text.

in which the unity of the three Divine Persons is most clearly revealed to us.

Shep. The unity of the Son with the Father appears from the tenth of St. John's Gospel, where Christ says, 'I and my Father are one;' and from the fourteenth of the same, where he tells Philip, who had desired him to 'shew him the Father, He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me?'

Cunn. These expressions relate not to a sameness of nature, but to an union made by consent and charity; for Christ, praying to the Father, saith, 'Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are one.' Hence it is plain, that there is no other unity implied by these passages, between the Father and the Son, than among the disciples; nay, as Christ prays, that the disciples 'may be one with the Father and him, as the Father and he are one,' it follows, that there is no other unity between the Father and Son, than that which subsists between them and the faithful.

Shep. If Philip, in having seen the Son, saw the Father also, as far as it was possible for a mortal to perceive the Divine Nature, there must certainly be an higher union between the first and second Persons of the Trinity, than there can be made between the divine and human nature, by mere charity or communion; for otherwise Philip's request was by no means gratified. Philip asked not to hear the words, or see the works, or taste the love of the Father, as Dr. Clarke interprets it; but to see the divinity of the Father; and Christ says he had seen that in seeing him. The unity of the Holy Ghost with the Father is proved from the tenth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, where the Holy Ghost is called 'the Spirit of the Father;' and his unity with Christ is proved from the fourth of the Epistle to the Galatians, where he is called 'the Spirit of the Son.' But there are several remarkable places of the New Testament, where the three Persons are mentioned together, with joint and equal marks of authority, as in the latter end of St. Matthew's Gospel, where a commission is given to the eleven to 'go and baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the

Son, and the Holy Ghost.' Here the authority of the Three is but one and the same. The recommendatory blessings at the ends of the Epistles are generally delivered in the name of the three Persons, as being the joint act of them all. In the First Epistle of St. John it is said, that 'there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one.' It is observable, that the Greek word τὸ ἕν, which we translate here, and in the passage just now quoted from the tenth of John's Gospel, by 'one,' is put in the neuter gender, so that it ought to be rendered, 'one thing or being.'

Cunn. The text last quoted from the first Epistle of St. John, which, were it Scripture, would come pretty home to your purpose, is, I think, with good reason, esteemed spurious. It is not found in many ancient manuscripts. Dr. Burnet, if I remember, says in his travels, that it is neither to be found in the Vatican manuscript, nor in that which is at St. James's; and Mills agrees that it is not quoted by any of the Greek fathers before, or in the time of, the Nicene council, confessing, that the epistle ascribed to Athanasius, in which it is found, is spurious.

Shep. It is certainly wanting in some old manuscripts; but it is found in many others; and what proves it genuine, beyond all contest, is, that Tertullian, St. Cyprian, and Fulgentius, cite it in their writings, the two former before the rise of the Arian controversy.[b] As to its being left out in some ancient manuscripts, Socrates, the historian, assigns the reason. He says, 'The Christian church had been perpetually complaining, that this Epistle of St. John had been corrupted by the first opposers of our Saviour's divinity.' We are not to be much surprised to find this text wanting in the Greek copies, rather than in the Latin, because the opposition given to the doctrine of the Trinity began, and reigned chiefly, in the Greek churches; so that a corruption of this nature was more likely to take place among the Greeks than Latins. Be this as it will, I must observe to you, that Mills, who is far enough from shewing a partiality for the text, insists, and that upon strong reasons, which it would be too tedious to recite here, on the genuineness thereof.

[b] Vide Millium in Locum.

Temp. And pray, Mr. Cunningham, will you let the doctrine of the Trinity pass upon us after all?

Cunn. After all what? How am I concerned?

Temp. O, it is very true; you are a parson. Let me try a little to recollect the substance of what I have heard concerning this doctrine. It seems, at first sight, to be highly repugnant to reason; but, upon considering the matter more closely, it appears, that we cannot possibly, by the light of reason and nature, know enough of God, either to prove there is a distinction in the divine Being, analogous to that of persons among men, or to demonstrate there is not. The proof is equally impossible on both sides; for we can prove no farther than we know, in any matter. The instances ususally given of a triangle, of a trine dimension in matter, of three faculties in the human soul, of a threefold piece of cloth, serve well enough to remove the difficulties objected to the doctrine of the Trinity, so far as they affect the possibility of a personal distinction, since God and person signify quite different ideas. The unity of God is no more destroyed in my mind by the supposition of three persons in God, than the unity of a piece of cloth after it is folded. So far I think we can hardly say, with sense and truth, that there is a mystery in the doctrine. But when we affirm, that each Person is not only a divine Being, but whole and entire God, apart from the other Persons, we then express a mystery, which no instances can reach.

Dech. Nor no mind or imagination understand.

Temp. I profess I understand it perfectly well, or I could not so easily distinguish it from the former point of doctrine that comes near it. Nay, I am confident you too must understand it; for how otherwise could you object a contradiction to it? We never say a proposition is true or false, consistent or contradictory, till we understand it. That which no mortal is able to understand in this proposition, is how the Deity should be whole and entire in each Person. This cannot be understood, and therefore can never be explained; but I think it may be believed, because it cannot be proved either impossible or contradictory, till we perfectly know the nature of God, and can conceive of unity, of identity, and of personality, not by analogy only, but as they are in their own proper nature, in their own immediate

sense, applied to God. I see plainly there is nothing in the world that deserves the name of a true religion, but the Christian; and I see as plainly, that the Christian religion is wholly insufficient, and the Scriptures wholly fallacious, if Jesus Christ is not God, and if the Holy Ghost is not God: yet, Mr. Shepherd, I must confess, the doctrine of the Trinity oppresses my mind, when I endeavour to pursue it into the several articles, in which it is set forth by the Athanasian creed.

Dech. The plain expressions, and necessary implications, of Scripture are just as bad.

Temp. As far as I can see, they amount to much the same thing; but the points, in which I am lost, are so far above my comprehension, and yet so necessarily connected with other points, the truth of which is not to be doubted, that I must either say, that is contradictory, which may possibly be otherwise; or say, that is false, which I cannot help believing to be true. Since, then, reason, and the light of nature, can offer nothing conclusive either for or against this doctrine, those who believe the Scriptures to be the word of God, must receive it; and such as look upon those writings to be the productions and forgeries of men, may reject it. Thus the controversy resolves itself into that concerning the truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, which hath been sufficiently inquired into already.

Shep. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, does God foreknow the actions of men?

Dech. He does.

Shep. Is his foreknowledge certain, or may he be mistaken in respect to our actions?

Dech. It is certain, and he cannot therein be mistaken.

Shep. Are we free as to our actions?

Dech. Yes, or we could not be moral and accountable.

Shep. It follows, then, that I may do or not do, that which God certainly foresees I will do. This seems to be a contradiction.

Dech. But there may be a faculty in God, and there certainly is, by which he foresees contingencies, and the actions of free beings, without causing those actions.

Shep. Have you any idea of that faculty?

Dech. None. It is inconceivable to me.

Shep. This, then, in respect to you, is an incomprehensible mystery. You said just now, that freedom of action is necessary to morality. Pray do you mean by moral freedom the power of doing good or evil, whichever we please?

Dech. I do.

Shep. Does not virtue and goodness then consist in doing good, when we might do evil?

Dech. It does.

Shep. And does not vice and wickedness consist in doing evil, when we might do good, or avoid doing evil?

Dech. It certainly does.

Shep. You believe, if I mistake not, that God acts by the eternal law of nature and reason.

Dech. I do.

Shep. Can he transgress that law, and do evil?

Dech. No, that would be a contradiction to his own nature.

Shep. It follows, then, that God is not morally free.

Dech. This would be a shocking conclusion. But the goodness of God's nature is such, that although he cannot do that which is evil, nor abstain from doing that which is good, yet he is perfectly free.

Shep. This also seems to be a flat contradiction. To say, that the infinite goodness of his nature makes it utterly impossible for God to do evil, is the same exactly as to say, he is under a natural necessity not to do evil. And to say he is morally free, is to say he may do evil. Now the necessity and freedom in this case being both moral, the contradiction is flat and plain, and amounts to this, that God, in respect to good and evil actions, is both a necessary and a free agent. Dr. Clarke, in his treatise on the attributes, labours to get clear of this contradiction upon your principles, but without success; and leaves it just where you, and all men, who hold the same principles, must be forced to leave it. To assert, 'that God cannot do evil, and yet is morally free,'[b] is to common sense a contradiction.

Temp. Yes, even in terms.

Dech. I own I can't tell how to account for it.

Shep. Own therefore, that you hold such mysteries in respect to the Deity as are even harder to be conceived, and

[b] See Clarke on the Attributes, 1st edition.

properly expressed or explained, than the doctrine of the Trinity. I could draw more instances of this kind from your notions of God; but these are sufficient for the present purpose, and plainly prove to us, that natural religion abounds with fundamental mysteries, which carry with them a stronger appearance of inconsistency, than that urged against the doctrine of the Trinity. When we talk of God, who is infinite and incomprehensible, it is natural to run into notions and terms, which it is impossible for us to reconcile. But in lower matters, that are more within our knowledge and comprehension, you, who are such an enemy to mysteries, and seeming contradictions, will be able to keep yourself clear of them. To say, that a curve line, setting out from a point within a hair's breadth of a right line, shall run towards that right line as swift as thought, and yet never be able to touch it, seems contradictory to common sense; and, were it not clearly demonstrated in the conchoide of Nechomedes, could never be believed. Pray is not matter infinitely divisible?

Dech. It is.

Shep. That is, it may be divided without end.

Dech. It may.

Shep. A cubical inch of gold may be therefore divided into an infinity of parts.

Dech. This is easily demonstrated.

Shep. And there can be no number greater than that which admits of an eternal increase.

Dech. There cannot.

Shep. Another cubical inch of gold may be infinitely divided also; may it not?

Dech. Yes, certainly.

Shep. The parts of both the cubes must be more numerous, than the parts of one only.

Dech. So it should seem.

Shep. Yet you said just now, that no number could be greater than the infinite number, into which the first cube could be divided. Here, sir, is a palpable contrariety of ideas, and a flat contradiction of terms.

Dech. We are confounded and lost in the consideration of infinites.

Shep. It is very true, and surely most of all, in the consideration of that infinite of infinites, in comparison of which all subordinate infinites must be perfectly obvious and intelligible. We justly admire that saying, that 'God is a Being whose centre is every where, and circumference nowhere,' as one of the noblest and most exalted flights of human understanding; and yet not only the terms are absurd and contradictory, but the very ideas that constitute it, when considered attentively, are repugnant to one another. Space and duration are mysterious abysses, in which our thoughts are confounded with demonstrable propositions, to all sense and reason, flatly contradictory to one another. Any two points of time, though ever so distant, are each of them exactly in the middle of eternity. The remotest points of space, that can be imagined or supposed, are, each of them, precisely in the centre of infinite space. The grand principle of attraction is in itself a mystery; and more so, if considered as the cause of repulsion; for how can matter, considered in itself, act through an absolute void, and at a distance, in order to attract or repel, alternately, or upon different bodies at the same time? Nay, its great inventor, after pursuing it through a long chain of experiments and demonstrations, leaves it a religious mystery, and can give no farther account of it, but that 'it is the power of God in matter.' The power of the civil magistrate, and the liberty of the subjects to call him to an account, and sit in judgment on his administration, or, in other words, the due extent of civil power and obedience, make a political mystery, which hath never been settled yet, and it is to be feared never will. Mysteries, in short, are admitted in natural, mathematical, and political knowledge, in all the most plain, trite, and common matters. But when we speak of God, who is the most inconceivable and mysterious of all beings, as if he alone were comprehensible, nothing truly is to be admitted, but what may be accounted for to reason. What is reason to God? It is an inch of line to an unfathomable ocean: it is a foot-rule to infinite space. From hence it appears, that the very first principle of all religion, of natural as well as of revealed religion, is a mystery, nay, the greatest of all mysteries; for it hath God, the most incomprehen-

sible and mysterious of all beings, for its object. And is the very fundamental article of natural religion itself a great mystery, both in respect to the extreme difficulty of finding it out by the mere force of our natural faculties, and to the impossibility, when it was found out, of comprehending the divine nature? Now, is it not a little extraordinary, that the advocates for natural religion, which is founded on a mystery, and abounds almost in every article with mysteries, should make it their greatest objection to Christianity, that it is, in some measure, mysterious? Mr. Dechaine, I will come to a very fair agreement with you.

Dech. What is that?

Shep. Tell me how you roll your eye, or move your finger; and if I do not return you a satisfactory account, and a clear demonstration, of the Trinity, I will give it up, and with it the whole system of the Christian religion.

Temp. Enough, I think, has been said concerning mysteries; and it does not appear, either that God could not require the belief of them, or that those of the Christian religion are such as could not have had God for their author. It is now time to inquire, whether there is any thing in this religion repugnant to the ends of religion in general, or prejudicial to mankind.

Dech. One so easily satisfied as you, may run from point to point, as fast as he pleases. However, I am as willing to be brief on subjects so dry and disagreeable, as your easiness of assent and faith can make you; and the rather, because howsoever plausible a defence the Christian revelation may seem to admit of in one respect, it cannot do so in all; and my arguments for the sufficiency of the natural light prove to me, that revelation is altogether needless, and, consequently, that every pretence to it is an impudent piece of imposture. But is it not time, think you, after so much thought and care for the soul, to provide for the poor body? Shepherd himself, though rapt in spiritual speculations and mysteries, must at length descend, like one of us, to repair the breaches of his corporeal tabernacle, and gratify the importunities of his outward man.

Shep. Yes; but I am thinking how much more convincingly I should argue for religion in the present times,

could I subsist without food, and save those who hear me, the expense of a maintenance.

Dech. A parson, and not eat! that would be a most persuasive miracle indeed.

DIALOGUE VII.

DECHAINE, TEMPLETON, CUNNINGHAM, SHEPHERD.

Dech. HAVING waded through the learned puddle of authorities, of manuscripts, translations, commentaries, mysteries, things calculated to confound and puzzle the understanding, we come now to the fair field, and firm ground, of reason, whereon, it is to be hoped, we may tread with more security and pleasure. The Christian religion, when brought to the touchstone of reason, must appear to be clogged with a gross alloy of ingredients, diametrically repugnant to the ends of religion in general, and highly prejudicial to the virtue and happiness of its professors. In the first place, a religion that tends to divide and embroil the world, to whet and embitter the minds of men against one another, is as little likely to do good, as to come from God. Man cannot live out of society; and such principles as make it almost impossible for him to live in it, must be of the most unhappy nature and tendency. If we believe the scriptural, and other Christian writers, their principles are of the last importance; and if we consult experience, I am sure we shall find they are so imperfectly or absurdly revealed, as to leave the world to numberless diversities of opinion about them. Now their obscurity makes divisions unavoidable, and their supposed importance inflames those divisions to a degree of animosity fatal to the repose and safety of society. In other quarrels we contend about honour, power, riches, and such like worldly trifles; but, in religious broils, the very souls of men are engaged, God and heaven are fought for, and the heart of man is raised to the utmost height of fury and rage. Hence debates, that could not be settled by the tongue or pen, come to be disputed with the sword.

Fire and faggot are brought in to eke out the arguments on both sides. Those, who fall in the quarrel, are canonized for martyrs by the one party, and damned for heretics by the other. The civil society is sorely shaken, if not totally ruined; and mankind become savages and wild beasts to one another: and for what? Why, for God's sake. I need not be particular, sir, in pointing out the unhappy times and transactions I hint at. What I have said, is only a short abridgement of your church history.

Shep. It is but too true. Pray, is the divinity of our Saviour plainly set forth in the New Testament?

Dech. It is: what then?

Shep. It cannot be said then, that the obscurity of this revelation occasioned the bickerings between the Athanasians and the Arians in old times, nor the disputes between us and the Socinians in these latter days.

Dech. No; but the repugnancy of that revelation to reason did.

Shep. I rather think it was man's high conceit of his own reason, than any real repugnancy between reason, truly such, and the revelation mentioned, that raised those frightful commotions we were speaking of. The mere obscurity of the revelation, is certainly and confessedly not to be blamed for them. Pray, is the doctrine of a future resurrection of the body plainly revealed in Scripture?

Dech. I think it is.

Shep. It was not owing, therefore, to any obscurity in this revelation, that Hymenæus and Philetus in the apostolical times, and the Quakers in our own, all professing Christianity, did and do maintain, that the resurrection is to be understood in a mere spiritual sense, and is already past. Is communion in both kinds plainly enjoined in the Scripture?

Dech. It seems so.

Shep. It is not, therefore, because our Saviour did not plainly command, and his immediate followers constantly practise, communion in both kinds, that a certain church hath, for many ages, denied the cup to the laity. Are water-baptism and the Lord's Supper clearly commanded in Scripture; and were they constantly observed in the apostolical times?

Dech. If we may believe the Scriptures, they were.

Shep. Yet the Quakers, who, if we may believe the Deists, are those among us, who come nearest to the primitive Christians, can see no such commands in Scripture. And it is there light within that blinds them. It is, indeed, something within, such as false reasoning, passions, prejudices, vanity, and nothing else, that can make men err about the sense of revelations so plain and determinate. As to the importance of certain Christian doctrines, it is not that which animates men to fury and cruelty, but the vainly supposed importance of their own detached opinions about them, and of their own ignorant zeal. Let a doctrine be supposed ever so important, that supposition hath no sort of tendency to inspire its professor with hatred to him, who does not receive that doctrine. But, if such a professor shall once take it into his head to believe, that he does God service in persecuting such as deny that doctrine, he will pursue them to death with fire and fagot. The doctrine he may have from Scripture; but his brutal and flaming zeal he draws from a foolish head, and an ill-disposed heart, of his own. There is no one duty so often, and so strongly, inculcated in Scripture, as that of charity. It is said to be greater than faith and hope. Without it the best graces, and the most excellent gifts, are accounted as 'sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal.' Those who want it are no Christians, nor is the religion of Jesus to answer for their behaviour. 'By this,' says Christ, 'shall all men know, that you are my disciples, if you have love one towards another.' And lest a thousand precepts, strongly enforcing charity, forbearance, and forgiveness, even by the hope of mercy from God, should not be sufficient to influence the proud and wrathful minds of men, Christ adds his own example to his precept; he prays and dies for those who spit upon him, and nail him to the cross.

Dech. Christianity, without zeal, is a lukewarm affair, and placed by you all on the same footing with irreligion or Atheism. But a religious zeal never seizes on the mind, without making the wildest work in the world, and exerting its fiery spirit in cruelty and persecution.

Shep. There is a reasonable and useful, as well as a culpable, zeal. They, who persecute others on a religious ac-

count, may call themselves Christians; and you, to throw an odium on that name, may honour such monsters with it: yet they are no Christians; they have neither the spirit, nor even the external mark, of Christ's disciples. As you well observe, it is to eke out weak arguments, and support the tottering cause of unsound opinions, that persecution is called in; and it is well worth observing, that those who have adhered the closest to the true principles and genius of our religion, have always shewn least of this persecuting zeal, and suffered most by it. It cannot be shewn, that those who were Christians in any propriety of speech, were ever guilty of persecution at all. But it is most astonishing, to hear the defenders of natural religion accusing the Christian with a spirit of persecution. Christianity hath ever been on the suffering side; and the whole stream of enthusiasm and persecution hath always run directly against it. The abettors of monstrous religions, which they drew forth from their own dark and corrupted minds, employed force and cruelty, such as the world never heard of before, against it at its first appearance; and, since its establishment in the world, the same sort of people have attacked it with all the engines of persecution in their power. They have persecuted it with artifice, ridicule, subtle arguments, and false aspersions. Other religions, though big with absurdity and wickedness, found an easy passage into the world; but the Christian hath always had the stream of men's corrupt affections, of their superstitious prejudices, of their policy, power, and malice, to struggle with. The ill-disposed part of the world, which is by far the greater part, could never bear the purity and strictness of its principles: they saw no promises, no heaven in it, at least for them; but dreadful denunciations, and intolerable terrors. Their deeds were evil, as well as their dispositions; and they could not bear its light. There was, certainly, somewhat more than common in the frightful reception and treatment it met with. I cannot help thinking there was more than human malice at the bottom of it, and more than human power to support its professors against such an astonishing opposition; but I do not think there can be a greater outrage upon modesty and common sense, than the charge brought against it, for infusing a persecuting

spirit, by those who, if we may judge by the virulence with which they rail at it now, would have struck at it with keener weapons than their tongues, had they lived in the earlier times, and been but half as powerful as they are maliciously disposed. Among all their tender lamentations over those who have suffered, which hath seldom happened, for wrong opinions in religion, we hear none for the primitive martyrs. It was cruel to put poor Vaninus to death, because he could not believe in God; but we never hear those Jews or Romans condemned by our modern Deists, who, in more than ten sanguinary persecutions, massacred and burnt so many thousands of inoffensive people, merely for being good themselves, and labouring to make others good. To hear the cry of persecution set up by Deists against Christianity, one would imagine Christ had murdered the whole Sanhedrim, and Pontius Pilate; that his apostles had massacred all the rest of the Jews, and that the primitive Christians had torn the poor Romans to pieces at horse-tails, boiled the flesh off their soldiers' bones in caldrons of hot oil, and roasted their emperors alive on red-hot gridirons.

Dech. This is all but cant and harangue. A religion, about which people cannot agree, must be of little service to the world. If I were going now to choose out one from a hundred different species of Christianity, how should I be determined? I want to go to heaven the nearest and safest way, quoth I; who will be my guide? I will, says the English priest. No one knows the way so well as I. Have a care, says the Papist! If you go with him, he will lead you to the devil. Follow me; and, though you shut your eyes, I will lead you a short and safe cut: we shall be there presently. Hold! says the Scotch priest: if you go with that fellow, he will lead you straight to the whore of Babylon, and pick your pockets by the way. Friend, step with me, saith the Quaker, and thou shalt enjoy the light of a lamp I have within. Pshaw! there is no need of burning daylight, says the Socinian: that fellow, however, attempting to snuff the candle of Christianity, hath put it out, and is as dark within as a dungeon: but I have the new light, a secret that makes the way to heaven as broad and as smooth as a turnpike. Do not roar so loud, gentlemen, I cannot, I per-

ceive, go with you all; I like that Englishman the best: your name is Shepherd, sir, I think. Will you be so good as to take me with you? I will just slip you into the right road, says Shepherd, and return to settle some affairs; besides, I am invited to a christening, and do not care to balk either my belly or my company. Have you any money about you? Yes. Well, you must pay for my directions: I live by shewing the right road to strangers. But, sir, won't you go along? The place I am travelling to is a fine place, and as well worth your seeing as mine. He who tells me the way to the New Jerusalem, and bids me first turn to my right hand, then to my left, and afterward hold straight forward, is nothing near so helpful to me, as he who goes along; for I may want company, or mistake directions. Every guide should go before; and, if I hire one, I shall take it very ill, if he be running to christenings and merry meetings, or turning off into by-ways, and committing me to a parcel of directions.[a]

Shep. Come, since you have invested me with the character of your guide, I will take my own part of the conversation upon myself. If, in travelling through a strange country, you can get no guide to go with you, what will you do then?

Dech. I will, at least, endeavour to get a route from some inhabitant, and the best directions I can.

Shep. You will not turn back, then, because you can get no one to guide you?

Dech. That is according to the importance of the business I go about. Perhaps I may know the road very well myself. If I think I do not, and must go forward, I have nothing to depend on but directions.

Shep. It is very true; and you know there may be people met with, who really know the road very well, and can direct another, though they may not be disposed to go that way themselves.

Dech. But, I am sure they cannot describe a road to me they have never travelled.

Shep. Do not be too positive about that. They may have good maps of the country, and exact surveys of the

[a] Vide Lucian's Hermotimus.

roads; and, besides, may have travelled a part of the way, and returned; and might be willing enough to go along with you, were they not sick, lame, or ill provided for a journey.

Dech. Aye, or blind, you might say; and, in that case, I had better want their company. But, even after I have put myself into the hands of an English guide, purely because he is my countryman; and we come to a place where the road divides on the one hand, into a broad and smooth way, on the other, into a narrow and craggy; and I see crowds of good English guides, taking down the broad way, with abundance of well bred company; and my own, after having recommended the narrow way to me, in which I see not a single fellow-traveller, beginning himself to strike off into the broad way, while others are beating out paths of their own in the fields, and every one crying out, Come along with me; what shall I do in this case, if I cannot safely choose for myself?

Shep. If you can neither turn back, nor stay where you are, you must consider which of the roads points towards the place you would go to; in case you have any notion of its bearing, that will greatly help you to determine. But even though you have not, if any of the guides should lead you through a little copse, to the top of an eminence, and from thence shew you the place you are travelling to, and a road continued on from the spot you are in, to that very place; this, surely, will relieve you from your distress. Your own natural stature is, perhaps, too low to give you the prospect of an extended country, which may be easily seen from a rising ground; or, if a wood should stand in your way, and obstruct your view, you must pass it, in order to see freely before you. As to the broad road, though it should seem ever so smooth and direct, and be crowded with travellers of the first rank, with coaches, equipages, and all sorts of conveniences and refreshments; nay, though you should see the guides all tripping it in the same road, and even your own shuffling off among the rest; yet, if it appears plainly to lead quite away from the place you would be at, you may be sure it is not for your purpose. As to the by-paths, they are the ways which singular and con-

ceited people choose for themselves, have no fences nor boundaries on the right or left; and you may plainly perceive they terminate either in nothing, or in one of the two greater roads, mostly, indeed, in the broad one. And as to the narrow one, if that appears to lead directly to the place you desire to arrive at, you can follow your own eyes, though he that shewed it you is not disposed to go along. Don't say, however, that there are no travellers in it; there are some, who will be your companions; and guides you no longer want, being now able to direct yourself. But if, as the road is in some places rugged and steep, and you but weak, you should want others to help you up, don't grudge to treat them at the inns; but if, instead of this, you should curse every morsel the poor men put in their mouths, should make a jest of them on all occasions, should sometimes even beat them, and tell them you want none of their assistance, and that you have eyes and legs of your own; you cannot blame the men, if they should soon grow tired of so troublesome a companion, and give you up to those eyes and legs in which you have so much confidence. But you are a traveller: one may ask you, I hope, without offence, whether you really design for any certain place. Do you know on what point of the compass it bears? Or are you only going, like a right English gentleman, to take a ramble of curiosity and pleasure, without much caring which way you go? If you have fixed on no point or place to terminate your journey in, it will be very hard for you to find a guide. Is it honour, or power, or riches, you are setting out for? If it is any of these, I believe you know, as well as most men, how to be your own guide; but, if you do not, there are thousands ready to take you by the hand. If, however, you would travel towards something not in this life, take no guides, but such as can, in one view, give you an entire prospect of the road. If you doubt whether there is any thing worth travelling for in another life, I need not caution you, I suppose, not to neglect what is present, till you have fully satisfied yourself, by some means or other, whether the things below, or the things above, are the best worth caring for.

Dech. I am sorry I happened, unluckily, to put you into this allegorical road; for I see there is no end to it.

Shep. Pray, sir, did not those nations, who were left to the light of nature, differ considerably about religious matters?

Dech. Pshaw! Shepherd, all nations have been left to the light of nature, in religious matters; and it was superstition and priestcraft that introduced absurdities and differences.

Shep. The light of nature must then have been very weak and dim, or it had never suffered such monstrous absurdities, and irreconcilable differences, to take an entire possession of all nations.

Dech. Be that as it will, no species of superstition, among the heathens, ever occasioned such bickerings and barbarities, as Christianity hath done.

Shep. Considering how little, either of reason or authority, any way of worship among them could plead in its own behalf, I should not be much surprised, if they were very indifferent about their religions: yet I find, they gave instances of bigotry and superstitious fury, infinitely surpassing those of the worst men that ever called themselves Christians. The Ombi, a people of Egypt, were zealous worshippers of the crocodile; the Tentyritæ abhorred that amphibious god, and had a trick of catching and riding him about, till they made him disgorge the carcases he had swallowed: those two nations entertained a most infernal hatred for each other, on account of this religious difference. They were not satisfied with putting one another to death in the cruelest manner; they even eat the flesh of their enemies raw, and he that came too late for the feast, licked up the blood of the slain, that had been spilt on the ground. This horrible instance of barbarity happened about Juvenal's time, and you may see the description of it, at large, in the fifteenth satire of that poet. Diodorus Siculus tells us, in his second book, that the ancient kings of Egypt, finding the people inclinable to conspiracies and commotions, assigned each city its particular animals for gods; to the intent that each community, hating the rest for their diversity of worship, might be the less inclined to confederate with them against their kings: and this, says the historian, took effect; for the inhabitants, in one quarter of the country, were perpetually upbraiding those of another with the impiety of their

worship: in after-times they added a great number of vegetable, to their animal, deities. Had you lived in that country, and in those times, high as you carry your notions of the light and religion of nature, you had certainly been a zealous worshipper of a dog, a cat, a clove of garlic, or an onion, and, very probably, a furious persecutor of the rest. You might, possibly, have suffered the dog and cat to snarl and scratch, for their respective divinities; but had you been an onionist, you would not have left so helpless a god to the teeth of a hungry and persecuting boor. But there is no need of multiplying instances to prove, either that man, left to himself, is so destitute of religious light, as to admit of the most foolish and portentous forms of religion; or capable of persecuting those who differ from him about religion, with the most horrid cruelty: the shocking barbarities, exercised by the Pagans on the Christians, furnish us with too pregnant a proof of this. Their light of nature suffered them to worship whores, and adulterers, and cutthroats, and devils; and to massacre those, who came to teach them the knowledge of the only true God, with fire and sword, by thousands. Nor was their cruelty the effect of a sudden and transient fury, or of mere popular rage. The emperors and people joined, and persevered in it, for several ages.

Temp. This objection of yours, Mr. Dechaine, about divisions and persecutions, is fairly thrown off from Christianity, and turned against your own hypothesis, concerning the sufficiency of the light of nature. The strongest sort of proof is drawn from facts, and the facts are directly against you.

Shep. Give me leave to close what I had to say on this subject with observing to you, that there is a great and wonderful agreement among Christians concerning fundamentals; that men are not more unanimous about other matters; and that, as I hinted before, it is not about religion, but about their own vain notions, rooted prejudices, and violent passions, that religious disputants make so great a sputter. I must, also, remind you of what hath been said concerning the vast advantages which the authority of the holy Scriptures derives from the disputes among Christians.

Cunn. You said a great deal on that subject, part of

which, indeed, was not amiss; but I must own, Mr. Shepherd, I cannot see how divisions, among the adherents of any religion, can be of service to that religion. The author of ours did not think as you do, when he inculcated the precepts you recited a while ago, enjoining charity and unanimity in the most pathetic terms.

Shep. Religious divisions, sir, or heresies, are as odious, in the sight of God, as any other species of evil; but out of this evil, great as it is, infinite wisdom knows how to extract some good. St. Paul touches on one of the benefits arising from divisions, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. 'There must be heresies,' says he, 'among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest;' by which he means, that those who are sound in the faith, may be distinguished from such as have secretly attached themselves to false doctrines, and may shine out, like gold refined from its dross. When such a separation as this is once made public, the contrivers of bad opinions, being forced to lay aside the mask of orthodoxy, have no longer an opportunity of insinuating their errors into the minds of well-meaning, but unwary people: besides, if we consider either the nature of revealed religion, or that of man, we shall perceive, that other great advantages may be drawn from religious differences. As to the first, I have already observed, that the writings, in which it is contained, and handed to distant countries or ages, are better proved to be genuine by vouchers violently incensed against one another from principle and passion, than by such as are unanimous in all things.

Dech. If any system of truths appears to be worth the retaining, mankind, for their own sakes, will not suffer that which is good in itself, and useful to them, to be lost; and therefore I cannot see what occasion there could have been for quarrelling about Christianity, in order to preserve it, had it been found necessary, by those who tried it. Besides, unanimity would have given a greater credit to your religion, than divisions could have done; and therefore seems a more promising preservative: for that which is placed between two, or more, contending parties, and bitterly fought for, by all, is often torn to pieces, and lost in the scuffle.

Shep. Our religion was found to be so well worth retaining, that it would, undoubtedly, have been preserved, had

its professors never differed about it. In that case, there had been no room for your present objection, indeed; but then your other, levelled against the genuineness of its records, would not have admitted of so easy, or so demonstrative an answer. As to the nature of man, it is such, so fickle, and fond of novelty, that, generally speaking, he is not apt, unless stirred by some passion, to be long earnest and warm in one thing: from hence, if there were no disputes about religion, might, in time, arise a coldness, and inattention to it. This, again, might produce a great, and, at length, a total ignorance of it. Nothing is so apt to rouse attention, and strike out knowledge, as disputes. The public disputations in our universities afford an experimental proof of this; for in those, although there is little else but reputation at stake, the disputants on both sides generally exert their utmost efforts for victory. But, when debates about religious differences are once set on foot, all corners of the question, under consideration, are beat into; light and truth are either forced out, or better supported, and riveted in the mind; while, at the same time, other collateral, or dependent truths, that did not before occur, are discovered: for a thorough debate on any question not only exercises the rational faculties, but also carries the mind into new topics of thought and inquiry. We light up a candle, perhaps, only to read by; but, while it shews us what is contained in the book we apply to it, it likewise brings into view every thing else about us, and enables us to examine what is said in the author before us, by what is advanced, either for or against it, in other writers. Thus it is, that while the enemy of truth labours, through the corrupt affections, and perverted reasonings, of men, to cloud or suppress the truths of religion; God, by the very same means, clears up old truths, strikes out new ones, and keeps the minds of mankind awake to religious knowledge. It was, perhaps, for this purpose, among others, that mysteries were revealed, and some doctrines, which might have been more fully delivered by divine inspiration, were designedly set forth in such a degree of obscurity, as could not fail to give the ill-disposed an occasion of cavil, and furnish the candid mind with an opportunity of exercise and inquiry. Now this is no more an objection to the goodness of Providence,

than his having given us our outward necessaries only upon the terms of labour, and continual care. How great is the wisdom of that Being, who hath so constituted human nature, that light must spring from darkness, order from confusion, and truth from prejudice and error!

Temp. It is not to be wondered at, that men should differ about religious matters, which naturally lead to metaphysical and abstracted inquiries, when there is so much disputation in arts and sciences, relating to sensible things. What is the next ingredient in Christianity, Mr. Dechaine, which, in your opinion, is detrimental to mankind?

Dech. I really think, if there were no other objection to Christianity, than that its rewards tend to make men mercenary, and its punishments to fill them with abject, I won't say chimerical fears, in which two consists the true definition of slavery; this alone, would be sufficient to weigh it down. In order to be either good, or happy, we must be free: but he can never be morally free, who is hired to good actions by an infinite reward, or deterred from bad ones by an infinite punishment: such allurements and terrors, whensoever they are firmly believed in, impose a moral necessity, and a moral necessity is sufficient to take away moral freedom. Then the clergy will never suffer either their principles, or their conduct, to be severely inquired into by people with whom they have any credit; so that not only the principles themselves, but the conduct of those who preach them, tend alike to enslave mankind. Pray, Mr. Shepherd, is he, who is withheld from stealing, merely by the fear of legal punishment, an honest man?

Shep. No.

Dech. Is he an honest man, who brings me a sum of money from my correspondent, which he would have run away with, had not that correspondent, or somebody else, promised him twice the sum, in case he returned with my receipt?

Shep. He is not.

Dech. Does it not plainly follow, then, that he who does good, only in hope of reward, and he who abstains from evil, merely for fear of punishment, is not virtuous, or honest?

Shep. This subject, concerning punishments and rewards, hath, I am sure, been sufficiently debated already; and therefore I think it a little odd to have it brought on the carpet again; which can hardly be done without repeating what was said before.

Dech. You entered on this topic for no other end, but to draw conclusions from it against the religion of nature: now I have as good a right to recall it, in order to make an advantage of it against revelation. Besides, sir, as it is now my turn to attack, and as your religion may be very well attacked, through the slavish effects of its sanctions; it will be proper to examine, a little, into those sanctions, in that light, which will render the topic almost new to us.

Shep. And so it must be, I find, till we are agreed about it, which, in all probability, will never happen. But I must comply. Pray, sir, when virtuous men do good, have they any reason for doing so? Or do they, in that, act without reason?

Dech. They have reason.

Shep. Can you assign that reason?

Dech. It is the love of virtue, the beauty of moral good, the pleasure inseparably annexed by our nature to the performance of a good action.

Shep. In like manner, when virtuous and honest men abstain from ill actions, have they any reason for their abstinence?

Dech. No doubt; they have the pain and remorse, that always follow the perpetration of a bad action, before their eyes.

Shep. Then, it seems, they do not choose to do good, purely because it is good, but for the pleasure that attends it; nor do they abstain from evil, merely because it is evil, but for fear of the pain and remorse that must follow. Thus your doctrine wholly takes away the moral difference between actions, considered in themselves, and renders them perfectly indifferent; and, in direct contradiction to itself, places virtue in self-interest, and places that self-interest entirely in punishments and rewards: for a punishment or reward may as well be natural, as positive; and may as well follow immediately upon the action, as be set at some distance from it. Now, of the two, he who waits some time for

his reward, is less mercenary, and he who extends his view to a distant punishment, is less slavish, than one who must have his reward in hand, or be punished on the spot, to make him good and honest; and if his future reward or punishment is much greater than the present motives of the other, he is, in proportion to that excess, a wiser man too. But pray, sir, what does moral freedom, opposed to moral necessity, consist in?

Dech. In the power to do good, or evil.

Shep. And what does freedom, opposed to slavery, consist in?

Dech. In the power of doing whatsoever may be for the benefit of the doer, and of abstaining from whatsoever may hurt him.

Shep. I think you was formerly obliged to claim, as a part of natural religion, these very sanctions, which you now object to: this is another instance, that a point, formerly proved upon you, nay, even granted by you, is still to be proved over again. This is generally the misfortune of all who dispute with Libertines. If freedom, as opposed to slavery, consists in the power of doing whatsoever may be for the benefit of the doer, and abstaining from whatsoever may be hurtful to him, he can never duly exert that power, unless the good, and the evil, are laid before him in their full extent and weight. If, therefore, future rewards and punishments are actually reserved for him, according as he shall acquit himself here; he can have no freedom of choice in that, wherein it most behoves him to choose judiciously, unless those rewards and punishments are timely notified to him, when he first enters on a course of moral actions. Between two things, utterly unknown to us, we can make no choice; and, if they are only imperfectly known, our liberty of choosing must be proportionably imperfect. Farther, the rewards and punishments of the Christian religion do not take away moral freedom; for it is plain from experience, that those, who most firmly believe in them, are often guilty of bad actions, nay, and sometimes of high crimes. They are often guilty of omitting that which is good, and doing that which is evil. And it is also manifest, that those sanctions of the Christian law do by no means make slaves of us: for, in the first place, they do not

at all compel; and, in the next, they only induce and move us to that which is undeniably for our own good.

Dech. But you granted, a while ago, that he who does good merely for hope of reward, and abstains from evil merely for fear of punishment, is not virtuous; and, if he is not virtuous, he can plead no merit, in order to a reward.

Shep. It is very true; and our religion teaches us to plead no merit in, nor claim any reward for, our best actions.

Dech. Your religion, then, does not tend to make you virtuous.

Shep. This is only playing with the name of virtue. Our religion, sir, tends to make us perform our duty to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; and this is of infinite service, both to us, and the society of which we are members, give it what name you will. Your rational religion founds morality on punishments and rewards; and, if virtue cannot be built on such an interested basis, you must be as far from it as we: but that our moral ties are much stronger than yours, is evident from hence, that we have all the natural motives to moral rectitude, by which your actions are influenced, and eternal rewards and punishments besides, which you are so far from thinking a trifling addition, that you look upon them as too great, and even compulsory. If we may believe Socrates and Plato, and, what is yet more, our own experience, virtue is partly a science, and partly a habit: as to its principles, it is purely a science; and, as to its practice and progress, it is altogether a habit. Men must first know upon what reason and grounds they are to be virtuous; and this introduces them to a course of good actions, and at length, to a conquest over their own corruptions; which, by degrees, exalts their natural love of good, and abhorrence of evil: and as it refines their nature to a nearer resemblance of God, so, in proportion, it fills them with the love of him, and, at last, establishes that glorious principle, as the motive and spring of all they do. Thus Christian virtue, which lays its deep foundations on self-interest and fear, rears its head to heaven, and ends in divine love. This progress, sir, which, on a former occasion, was sufficiently dwelt on, is natural: even Shaftsbury, in his inquiry into virtue, owns, that it cannot be perfect without re-

ligion, and I must insist, that, without religion, it cannot be at all; it must both begin and end in religion: and, I may venture to say, no man was ever really good, who did not set out with his eye on the sanctions of religion, and, holding the judgment-seat of God in view, did not rise from the fear to the love of God, and make a progress in virtue from lower to higher motives of action. Pray consider, Mr. Dechaine, that man is very far from being supreme; that he hath a bounded and subordinate nature; that he brings up the rear of intelligent beings; and that, of consequence, he is made for subjection and obedience; insomuch that he must either have a master, or a tyrant, over him. He is not, therefore, under pretence of liberty, to aim at a boundless latitude and licence to do what he will, and fear nothing: if he breaks loose from the commands and ordinances of his true and natural master, he will be far from finding himself at liberty; passion and appetite will quickly seize the runagate, and compel him to forge grievous chains for himself. If he would not be the vilest, and most abject, of all slaves, he must be the servant and subject of that master, whose service is his only and perfect freedom, his greatest honour. The will of man lies next his actions, and is the immediate spring of all he does. Now it is sometimes influenced by reason, and sometimes by passion: when reason, rightly informed and directed, holds the reins of the will, the man is free; because reason, truly such, will not only give him a choice of action, but also furnish him with motives to such actions, as are conducive to his real happiness; but, when passion usurps the government of the will, the man is then a slave; for passion is blind and violent, will take away his moral choice of actions, and force him upon such a conduct as is highly prejudicial to him. Gross errors can pervert reason; violent temptations can stir up passion to rebellion; and either reason or passion may misguide the will: but none of these is sufficient to denominate the man a confirmed slave, till reason becomes habitually attached to error, and passion to temptation: then it is, that the will is forced to point the actions directly against the interest of the agent, and the man is an absolute slave. Here the downward progress of vice is somewhat parallel to the rise and ascent of virtue, and habit puts the finishing hand to both. Now, sir, I can

see nothing, but divine instruction, that is able rightly to inform our reason, and guard it against important errors; and I can see nothing, but the principles and sanctions of the Christian religion, that affords any foundation to human liberty. He is said to be a slave to another, who must always follow him, do what he commands, adopt all his desires and aversions, and undergo any hardship in the service of his master: it is thus that the passions, those internal tyrants, are themselves, in some men, drawn at the tails of sensual objects so strongly, that they cannot resist, let the mischiefs of following be ever so great and obvious; and reason, instead of being able to call them back, is herself dragged along also, and obliged to pimp and cater, like a slave, for her own servants. The will, having no ally, and being obliged to execute whatsoever the mind shall dictate, is carried away with the rest, and absolutely enslaved. Now in the natural man there is nothing of force sufficient to set those slaves at liberty.

Dech. Yes; the grievous evils, to which the slavish dance after the passions leads the man, will, at length, correct him.

Shep. It will be a little too late, if he should chance to die in the service; and it is highly probable he will: but experience is against such hopes of reformation. We perceive that reflection and reason do little else than endeavour to methodize and reduce the manner of pursuing sensual objects to such a system of expedients, as may render that pursuit more safe and successful for the future. Does the debauchee, for instance, quit his bottle, because it threw him into a fever? Or the lewd man his uncleanness, because he hath got a foul distemper? No; he only considers how to gratify himself, for the future, at less expense, and risk to his health. Did Cæsar quit his ambitious and oppressive schemes upon the rough treatment he received at Dyrrachium? Far from it: he only employed all the force of his vast understanding to extricate him out of the present difficulty, and to take his measures better afterward. Cæsar was the greatest slave in the Roman empire; for he was compelled, by his ambition, to undergo infinite toils and dangers: for what? Why, for a dagger, and an untimely death.

Dech. But you will allow, that some men, shocked at the miseries of a vicious life, which they have wofully experienced, betake themselves afterward to more regular courses.

Shep. Yes, that I shall readily allow; but must, at the same time, insist, that the number of those reformades, who are mended merely by their vices, is extremely small; that they are perpetually in danger of forgetting the rod wherewith vice had chastised them, and relapsing into their old habits of sin; and that therefore, in order to a safe and constant course of virtue, some principle is required that can go deeper than the faint remembrance of a few transient sufferings, and tear up their habits by the roots.

Dech. All I contend for is, a liberty of thinking for myself, and not to suffer another, who makes a profit and a trade of thinking for me, to impose his thoughts on me.

Shep. Till error or vice has enslaved you, your freedom of thought, whatever you may be compelled to speak or do, can never be taken from you. If, by thinking for yourself, you mean thinking for your own pleasure and interest, which seems, in a very low sense, to be the true interpretation of those words so often canted by libertines; you cannot think more effectually to that purpose than by thinking as a Christian; because Christianity sets your true pleasure, and greatest interest, before you, and best shews you how to pursue them.

Dech. You will grant, however, that in order to be sincere in my principles, I must think freely for myself; because, in order to examine fairly, and become rationally and sincerely a Christian, a Mahometan, or what you please, it is necessary one should have no bias in favour of this or that modification of religion; that is, it is necessary one should be a true Deist.

Shep. A true Atheist, you mean; for, as Deism is a sort or modification of religion, and as that also ought therefore to be fairly examined, without bias or attachment, you ought to have no religion when you set about such an inquiry. And, as to your sincerity, it is indeed a good attendant upon a fair and candid inquiry; but I am sure it is of little advantage to be sincere in principles hastily espoused, for better for worse, upon the bare recommendation of passion and

corruption, and tending to enslave and undo their unhappy abettors. Have you ever been an Atheist, Mr. Dechaine?

Dech. Never.

Shep. Upon your own principles, therefore, it is plain, you have never done justice to Christianity in quitting it, nor to Deism in going over to it, by a fair and unprejudiced examination. How do you know but your former principles of Christianity may have given your mind a bias in favour of Deism, to which, as well as to Christianity, it is a common fundamental to own but one God? Perhaps, had the matter been more candidly considered, you might have found reason for being a Polytheist. How, on the other hand, can you be sure you condemned Christianity on good grounds, since you could not do it till you was a Deist? Or is there not good reason to suspect you have been too hasty in rejecting Mahometism, since, at no time of your life you was wholly unattached to some religion or other that must have prejudiced you against that of the Koran? You could never have fairly weighed any two religions against each other, while you yourself was in one of the scales. Depend upon it, you have the whole work to do over again; and, pardon the appearance of a solecism, must prove all religions to be false before you can prove any one of them to be true. I wonder how this thought, so consequential to your own principles, so near the very scheme you built on, and so necessary to your setting out right, could have escaped a man of your penetration.

Dech. I do not know how it is you talk and refine upon things; but I am sure it is plain from experience, that Christian principles, as the tragedian observes, make cowards of all who hold them; insomuch, that they neither dare act nor think as becomes men: if they durst think, they would soon find reason to renounce them; and a little courage in thinking might go a great way to produce liberty of acting.

Shep. Yes; Christianity makes cowards of its professors, no doubt: witness our martyrs, to whom Alexander and Cæsar were arrant runaways. The same cannot be said of your principles; they make you your own masters, they give you boldness to do any thing, and every principle is as good as a provocative. I am much delighted with your new notion about courage in thinking: a bold heart may put a man

upon doing the finest things; but it is necessary to have a stout head, in order to an heroic exploit in thought: such are the heads, I suppose, that produce Atheism; and, when any one stops short at Deism, it is only through a pusillanimity of brain. But what if men, growing bold-headed, should begin to butt at your employment, as well as ours? In respect to yours, as it is practised among us, there is, if I mistake not, some occasion for a little courage, in order to freethinking. Most men, if we may judge by their actions, value their estates and fortunes infinitely more than they do their souls; the law costs them, at least, as much money, and a thousand times more trouble and vexation, than religion. The poor parsons make a secret of nothing, tell all they know, and invite the world to inquiry and debate about religion; but the law, in which every man is concerned, as well as in religion, and, I am afraid, a good deal more interested, is a mysterious art, which we laity, in respect to the law, have not courage enough to understand, nor are we allowed to practise it for ourselves if we did. As to physic, we have had a good many freethinkers in the way of that useful science, some of whom, as Montaigne, &c., believed it to be altogether a cheat; others, upon reading a few books wrote by physicians, and borrowing a few ill-digested scraps of knowledge from thence, and more from the writings of pretenders and empirics, have taken upon them to rail at the whole faculty, to set up for practice themselves, and, for lack of other patients, have tampered with their own constitutions. I know a most sufficient gentleman of this stamp, whose hypothesis it was, that taste and nature dictate the most sovereign sort of nostrums for all our bodily disorders. Accordingly, he prescribed to himself and others whatsoever they liked best, in all kinds of distempers, and, you may be sure, to most wonderful effect. The science that prescribes to the body hath its dabblers and opposers, as well as that which prescribes to the soul; but experience and necessity are too strong for them in both cases; and the physician and parson are sent for. An empiric, or mountebank, may kill their thousands, and this may bring physic into disrepute with silly and giddy people; but if a Mead, or a Hulse, should, by the force of skill and medicine, save one patient from misery or death, it would shew

demonstrably, that physic is not a mere imposition; and the mortality that attends the quacks, instead of raising in sensible people a distrust of medicine, shews demonstrably, that those pretenders only kill because they know nothing of the art of cure.

Dech. A fine allusion, truly! and so the parsons are the only true and genuine physicians for the soul, and all others, who speak or write for the religious information of mankind, are pretenders and quacks.

Shep. In my opinion, every one who hath sufficient ability and piety for the purpose, hath also a right to speak and publish his knowledge for the good of mankind; but it is not a man's own conceit that can prove him thus qualified. Upon the whole, liberty of thinking is necessary to right reasoning; but when it is pleaded for, only in order to an unbounded licentiousness of action, when we set up for thinking freely for ourselves, in order to act as freely for ourselves, to the great prejudice of others, and even of ourselves, in the end; this is either such a false kind, or such an excess, of liberty, as cannot fail to terminate in real slavery and misery. Montaigne shewed what sort of a latitude it is that libertines would be at, when he said, 'I am such a lover of liberty, that if the king of Spain should make a law to hinder Montaigne from setting his foot on a certain square yard of ground at the straits of Magellan, I should begin to think my liberty abridged, and myself confined.' And is it a liberty without bounds, in respect to religion and morality, that man, little, narrow, subordinate man, would assume? Is it a liberty to think and do what he lists, that an ignorant, corrupt, and wicked wretch would pretend to? Yes; the thief would escape from his gaol, and the murderer from his fetters, if he could. And what use would he make of his liberty? Why, he would steal or cut throats again.

Temp. Human liberty, both of thought and action, certainly hath its bounds, which are a real defence, and by no means a confinement to it: all the laws of men are founded on this supposition, that no man can be free or safe, unless all men are, in some measure, bound, and some men wholly confined; and the laws of God only add higher and stronger boundaries, inasmuch as they bind the consciences, whereas those of civil society only tie up the hands of men. Pray,

Mr. Dechaine, have you any other objections to the usefulness of the Christian religion?

Dech. How can a religion be useful to those who never had the least opportunity of knowing it? Christianity was not introduced into the world till four thousand years after its creation, and hath not yet extended to the greater part of mankind. They who make it highly useful, nay, even necessary, are not well aware, that, if it were so, a good God could not have denied it to any of his creatures, nor a just God have given it to a few, and refused it to the rest.

Shep. In order to prove it inconsistent with the goodness of God to defer the introduction of a necessary religion for four thousand years, and then to extend it only to a part of mankind, it lies upon you, sir, to prove, that God is, by his goodness, necessarily determined to do all manner of good to all his creatures, at all times; and then to shew, that Christianity, supposing it highly useful or necessary to the whole world, had been more extensively and effectually useful, if it had been delivered to our first parents, and not in a later age. These points have a necessary connexion with that which you have objected to Christianity from the goodness of God; and cannot, I believe, be proved: for, as to the first, the infinite nature of God is free, and limited by no necessities of this, or any other kind; creation and being, with all the good things annexed to them, or made to result from them, are free gifts from God; he could have withheld them; and therefore his goodness is manifested in granting them, and our gratitude due upon receiving them. Were it not so, God would be but an instrument in the hand of necessity; and though what he did would be always good in effect, yet it would argue no goodness in the cause, no other goodness in God, than what we see in necessary and inanimate beings such as the dispensation of light and warmth from the sun, which it cannot withhold, and which we can return it no thanks for, without gross absurdity and idolatry. We adore the goodness of God, because, when he could have withheld us for ever in the womb of nothing, he freely bestowed a comfortable and happy being on us; and, when he could have destroyed us for ever on account of our defection from him, he mercifully preserved our race, and provided, as well as the nature of

things would permit, for our recovery and happiness. Nor does it a whit more reflect on the justice, than the goodness of God, to have extended the benefits of a necessary religion only to a part of mankind. Your objection itself makes a distinction between the divine goodness and justice, and supposes the former to be the source of all the benefits we receive from God. Now, if it be so, whether we suppose those benefits to be necessarily or freely given; yet still they cannot be the effects of divine justice: for if they were, then we should have a right to them; and, consequently, in receiving them, should receive no bounty nor benefit. It is nonsense to say, we can have a right to a free gift.

Dech. But the injustice consists in the unequal distribu tion supposed, which you, who make Christianity so necessary, and yet date its introduction so late, ascribe to God.

Shep. This will be of some weight, if it be first proved, that a sinful and rebellious race of creatures have a right to every thing that is necessary to their happiness; and that God cannot, without injustice, refuse the good he does us; that whatsoever good God does to one age or person, he is in justice bound to do to all ages and persons; that we have all, not only a right, but an equal right, to what is, truly speaking, the mere effect of infinite bounty and compassion; and that the author of Christianity hath made it necessary in such a sense, that nothing else could have sufficed in the place of it at any time; that no part of it could have answered the occasions of men, and been given before his own coming; that the whole of it was absolutely necessary to all mankind; and that all mankind, in all times and places, stood equally in need of it. As all these points are necessarily connected with your objection drawn from the justice of God against the unequal distribution of Christianity, it lies on you, sir, to prove them, in support of that objection. But I am very confident, neither you, nor any man else, can prove a single one of them.

Dech. How inconsistent is all this with the pains you took, the other day, to make me confess the necessity of a true religion!

Shep. But that necessity, sir, arises from our want of the true religion, in order to arrive at the perfection of our

nature, and true happiness, not from the attributes of God, as is plain from what hath been already said, and farther from the miserable ignorance of those many populous nations, which, for a long course of ages, have been absolutely, or, at least, almost wholly, destitute of sufficient means to attain to the true religion, whether through the prevalence of the old and rivetted prejudices, which they had nothing to oppose or conquer; or through an extinction of the natural or original light, which, in respect to religion, they had nothing to revive. In most countries no efforts were used to rekindle the one, or dissipate the other; and in Greece and Italy, where philosophy and human talents did their utmost, although helped a little by eastern traditions, hardly any thing like religious truth was struck out; and the little that was, could not be propagated. All this time, sir, if you will own, that the knowledge of one only God, and his attributes, is true religion, the Jews, being favoured with ample means of that knowledge, were distinguished by Almighty God from all the Gentile world. Besides, even among the Gentiles, one person by the force of stronger talents, and a better education, drew nearer to the truth than another; and a few, than all the rest. These facts, too glaring to be denied, fully refute that equal distribution of religious knowledge, contended for in vain by you, and other Deists; for, had God been obliged in justice to preserve such an equality, no doubt, both the talents and instructions given to all mankind must have been exactly equal.

Dech. Can God be partial? Hath he favourites, whom he distinguishes by extraordinary marks of his kindness, bestowed on them before they can possibly have any merit?

Shep. We may ask a hundred such questions on the other side, which fact will forbid you to answer, as modesty will not suffer me to answer yours. Does the light of natural religion flow through the faculty of reason? Is reason equally clear and operative in all men? Are the passions of all men by nature equally manageable? Are the natural tempers of all men equally disposed to virtue? But, admitting that God were either by necessity, or justice, as irresistibly and absolutely determined to our good, as a stone is to descend; yet will it not follow, that he must

have conferred the gospel on the first age of the world, unless it can be sufficiently proved, that in so doing he would have done more good to mankind, than hath been done by sending it four thousand years later. Now, if I mistake not, the contrary to this may be easily made appear. In order to this, let us premise, that the Christian religion had not at all been necessary, or even requisite, had not man fallen from the dignity of his nature into a state of corruption and misery, or rather into a strong disposition to degenerate into such a state; that to recover them out of this state, such means became necessary, as were suited, not only to the nature, but the degree of this corruption; and that it was contrary to the wisdom of God to destroy and create human nature anew, as it was beneath his majesty to let it stand as it was, and take away sin by a continual and miraculous force put upon it.

Dech. Before you go any farther, I must enter my caveat against your postulatum about the fall of man; which, after all you said on that subject, I am far enough from being convinced of. I shall not, however, break the thread of our present inquiry, by obliging you to repeat your speculations on a point, from whence, if proved, you will be far enough from drawing any advantage; for if mankind became corrupt and wicked, and Christianity was the only cure for that corruption, it follows, that the remedy ought immediately to have been applied, were it for no other purpose, but to prevent the increase of wickedness. Proceed.

Shep. Had Christ been sent, and his religion fully and finally revealed, in the first age of the world, either the memory of the first, and the effect of the last, must have been entirely lost, or so distorted and corrupted in a few ages, that posterity would have been little the better for such a mission or revelation; or else God must have made an infinity of other revelations, in order to ascertain and perpetuate the Christian to future times. Arts, sciences, languages, commerce, must have been all taken out of the natural course of invention and improvement, and all at once revealed: or else it would have been impossible to transmit our religion either to very distant times or countries, with any tolerable degree of purity; or, admitting it had been possible, yet what opinion must posterity have

entertained of a religion handed down to them from nobody knew whom, from times, and by means, utterly unknown, which no mortal could account for, as being previous to all memory, all records, and all history? How would our libertines, so nice and scrupulous about authorities, have liked such a religion as this? It must have been heard upon the same footing of credibility with the wandering Jew, who, in the last age, pretended to have been contemporary with Christ; but those who would believe him, were to depend upon his own word, for which there was not one voucher, either book or man. But God hath dealt more tenderly and candidly by our reason, in giving the full manifestation of our religion at a time, when it could be best examined and propagated.

Dech. But if languages grammatically fixed, with arts, sciences, and commerce, were so necessary to the propagation and perpetuity of a revealed religion, and such a religion so necessary to the wants of mankind, why then were not all these helps revealed at the beginning? Why was the world left to a tedious improvement of knowledge, needful for so great a purpose?

Shep. Nay, rather why was not the world destroyed, and a new one made? Why was not man, now corrupted and stained by sin, broken down in a mortar, refined in an alembic, and moulded up anew? Why hath not God, by a miraculous interposition of his power, remedied and removed all the evils, moral and natural, of this world? There is no end of such questions. But had God been ever so profuse of miracles in respect to arts, sciences, &c. this alone would not have sufficed, because the number of mankind was not, in the infancy of the world, great enough for the purpose. The authority of a few witnesses, in such a case as this, will never answer the end. Besides, as you would not be content with any sort of a tradition, but a written one; and as a prodigious number of artisans are necessary to the finishing one, not to say a sufficient number of books; hands had been wanting, till long after the death of Abel, and many others, who, according to your nice notions of God's goodness and justice, must have been deprived of their right to revelation, had that revelation waited for a competent increase of mankind.

Dech. I do not perfectly understand you. Might not God have taught Adam to write, as well as speak? Might not Adam have recorded in writing the perfect revelation, had it been made to him? Might not his sons, after seeing the miracles that ushered in this revelation, have set their hands to the grand certificate or record, containing an account of those miracles, and of the doctrines proved by them? And might not this record have been copied and preserved genuine, as well as the Jewish or Christian Scriptures?

Shep. Had the full revelation of religion been made to Adam immediately after he was created, we could have had but one witness to it. Had it been deferred till his sons came to years of discretion, it could have had no more witnesses than he had children; and at the flood the attestation for the genuineness of this record must have been that of eight persons only. But pray consider, sir, religion could not have been fully revealed, without Christ's appearing in the flesh, and dying for the sins of mankind. Had he appeared in Adam's time, who would have put him to death? Or who would have persecuted and murdered his witnesses, that is, Adam, and his children? And, if his witnesses had suffered nothing for their attestation, surely you, who cannot believe those witnesses who sealed their testimony with their blood, must have been still farther from giving credit to such as Adam's family could have afforded. Thus, sir, it is plain, that a perfect revelation of our religion could not have been either made or recorded in the beginning of the world. But such a revelation was not then necessary. So much of Christianity, as the world wanted at that time, was actually revealed. God and his will were made known, the Redeemer promised, and sacrifices instituted, to communicate the merits, and keep up the expectation, of the grand sacrifice. This might have been sufficient; but if mankind, in part, lost sight of these revelations, it shews what must have become of Christianity, had it been perfectly revealed in the first age of the world. That such a revelation as I speak of, was made in the earliest ages, is manifest from the traces and footsteps of it, found to this day in the most barbarous nations. If we may give any credit to history, mankind did not, immediately after their fall, rush

into the utmost depravity of manners. They degenerated gradually, and vice in its infancy might have been kept at bay by an imperfect revelation, as easily as afterward by a full manifestation of religion. All nations have complained of their own wickedness, and, upon comparing their morals with those of former ages, have styled themselves degenerate.

Temp. The mythological notions of a golden, a silver, a brazen, and an iron age, are an evidence of this.

Shep. Nay, the gravest historians speak in the same strain; and we ourselves see, that nations do not all at once degenerate from virtue to vice, but corrupt themselves by degrees, as bad principles and customs creep in. It is evident, that the ancients were something more than man, I mean as man is now. Their strength and longevity before, and some time after the flood, shew us, that their bodies were sounder and firmer than ours, or, at least, that they lived more temperately than we. The inventions of the ancients, their buildings, and performances of wit and genius, afford us no less testimony in favour of their minds. Nature, in youth and maturity, could with a little assistance do that, which now in its old age it cannot perform, without greater strength than its own. Its youth could act with vigour, and support itself with a graceful firmness; but its old age require the crutch, and the staff.

Temp. But, as mankind degenerated, that goodness which moved Almighty God to send his Son, and a perfect religion, at length into the world, must, I should think, have shewn itself in such occasional interpositions and revelations, as the oblivion of primeval revelations, and the increase of wickedness, made expedient.

Shep. And accordingly it did. The earlier ages of the world were not so destitute of revelation as some people imagine. There is no sort of reason to think there were any idolaters before the flood. The great age of the Antediluvians made it almost impossible for them to lose sight of the true God; for two persons could have handed down the knowledge of God, and his will, from the creation to that great event; when such an example was given of God's displeasure at sin, and such a covenant made with mankind in their common parent, as could not fail of excellent effects

for many ages. The Mesopotamians and Canaanites were, in all probability, the first who corrupted themselves with idolatry; and that not till about the time of Abraham, nor then neither, any farther than in respect to the use of images, and a trust in subordinate beings, whom they supposed, as the Papists do, to act under the Supreme Being. The Abimelechs, kings of Gerar, and Laban, though an image-worshipper, adored the true God, as appears by their joining in sacrifice with Abraham and Jacob. The same may be said of the kings of Egypt in those days; for he whom Abraham had to deal with, talked familiarly of God, and had even divine revelations made to him; and yet the Egyptians were not far behind the first idolaters. The ancient Persians were worshippers of the true God, only under the symbol of fire; and as they used no images, so even in the time of Xerxes they destroyed the heathen temples wherever they came. Their posterity, the Persees in the East, preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God to this day. And, as to China, idolatry had got no footing there till two thousand years after the flood. The ancient Italians, who were a plain and virtuous people, had no temples or images, and probably no idolatry among them, till near the Roman time. Even in those countries and ages, wherein idolatry was most prevalent, they believed in one Supreme Being, whom they looked upon as the Creator, and Father, and Ruler of all things in heaven and in earth. The history we have of ancient idolatry makes it appear to have commenced, some ages after the flood, in the East; then to have infected Egypt, and spread from thence, by the means of commerce, into Greece, Italy, and the Western world. Were we as well acquainted with the ancient history of more remote and less corrupted nations, we might possibly find them longer in the enjoyment of the true religion, than those mentioned. But as mankind were gradually losing sight of their ancient religious traditions, and adopting idolatrous innovations of their own invention, God left them not wholly destitute of assistance. He raised up prophets and wise men in all the countries, of which we have any history, who laboured to stem the tide of ignorance and corruption. The Israelitish family and nation had a continued succession of revelations made to them; and by their commerce and wars with other

nations, and their frequent captivities, must have afforded an opportunity of knowing the true God to an infinite number of people. Canaan had its Melchisedek; the countries beyond the Euphrates had their Balaam; Uz, and the countries adjacent to Arabia, had their Job; Nineveh its Jonas; China its Confucius; Persia its Zoroaster; and Greece its Socrates, who laboured to restore the true religion and morality. Other countries had probably other teachers; but we can follow this matter no farther than history leads us. Notwithstanding these helps, idolatry and wickedness gained ground, and made the necessity of greater assistances every age more pressing. But the way was to be paved for their approach, and the world disposed to receive them.

Temp. I fancy the means made use of in order to this disposition, could they be discovered, would open a very surprising scene.

Shep. In order to it, the Jews, being instructed by the prophecies of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Job, David, Isaiah, Zechariah, Micah, and Daniel, began to turn their eyes on the advent of their great Deliverer; and the expectations they entertained of his arrival they infused by various means into the minds of the Gentiles, among whom they were dispersed by the Babylonian, Grecian, and Roman conquests. It was for this purpose that they were mixed with all the known nations of the East and West, and in process of time had their synagogues in all the great cities, and the writings of their lawgiver and the prophets translated into the Greek language.

Temp. You speak of this chosen people, as if God had singled them out from other nations, only in order to convey through their captivities, to the rest of the world, some knowledge of the true religion.

Shep. If you believe the world to be governed by Divine Providence, you can no otherwise account for the history of the Jews, than upon a supposition, that God distinguished them by revelations on the one hand, and captivities on the other, only to make them subservient to the instruction of other nations. In this light the whole history, from their first descent into Egypt to this day, presents us with a scheme of Providence, not only consistent in itself, but extensively conducive to the good of mankind: in any other,

it is nothing else than a series of absurdities, of severities inflicted on favourites, or of miracles wrought to preserve a stiff-necked and detestable people. Their posterity was never at any time of a long continuance, without introducing idolatry; this was usually punished with captivity and dispersion; upon which, as the only means of restoration, they immediately returned to the worship of the true God, and a strict observance of their own customs. These were too peculiar not to excite the curiosity of their masters; and they too impatient of slavery not to wander into other countries, as often as they could escape from their oppressors, in hope of better treatment. It is probable some of them penetrated as far as China, long before the Christian era; because in that country notices are yet to be found, to which we cannot rationally assign any other original, than some ancient acquaintance with the Jews. If we may believe the traditions of the Chinese, Confucius, their great philosopher, who lived above five hundred years before Christ, had this remarkable saying often in his mouth, "It is in the West that the true Saint is to be found." And Laokun, who lived before Confucius, was as remarkable for another saying, which seems to point at the Trinity: "Eternal Reason produced one, one produced two, two produced three, and three produced all things." They tell us farther, that Mimti, one of their emperors, who reigned about sixty years after Christ, sent ambassadors, at the instigation of an apparition, to look for the Saint that Heaven had informed him was in the West.

Dech. Pray, sir, who gives you these accounts from China?

Shep. The missionaries, who drew them from the Chinese records.

Dech. And are they to be credited?

Shep. Most certainly; for these accounts could serve no ends of theirs; and they durst never have forged them, for fear of being detected by other Europeans, who visit China as well as they. The Grecian and Roman philosophers, who had in vain sought with their utmost diligence for right notions of religion, and the means of pleasing God, and making themselves happy, were, long before Christ's coming, taught by Plato to expect an Instructor sent from

God, to inform them about such matters. Alexander the Great, having been invited by an apparition in the figure and dress of Jaddus, the Jewish high-priest, went over into Asia, and conquered all the countries from the Mediterranean and the Hellespont, to the Ganges; and he and his followers established the Grecian arts and language throughout that extended empire, which comprehended Egypt also, and the adjacent countries. The language of this empire, which exceeded those of all other countries in beauty, regularity, and preciseness of expression, was also the learned and fashionable language of the Romans, who, after making themselves masters of the Western world, added the Greek empire to their conquests; by which means the Greek tongue, being understood both in the East and West, became an admirable vehicle for the religious knowledge that was to be conveyed by it to the world. Such were the preparatives to that fulness of time, spoken of in Scripture for the introduction of a true and universal religion. After the nations had been thus united by conquest, by commerce, and by a general language, the Jews, who saw by the prophecies of Jacob and Daniel, that the time for their deliverance was approaching, vainly believing, that their Messiah was to be a temporal prince, and to advance them to an empire over all the world, published certain verses, under the name of Sibylline Oracles, to give them the greater credit with the Romans. In one of these, which were all founded on the prophecy of Daniel, it was foretold, that at the time when Pompey took Jerusalem, nature was about to bring forth a king for the Roman people; at which, says Suetonius, the senate being frightened, made a decree, that no child born that year should be brought up. In another they foretold the rise of a heavenly kingdom, which should prevail, as soon as the Romans should conquer the Egyptians. In a third they predicted the same, upon the extinction of the Lagean line, which happened at the death of Cleopatra. These pretended oracles, which the Jews spread about every where, received no small addition of credit from a very old prophecy, which, according to Suetonius and Tacitus, was taken from the sacred writings of the priests, and foretold that a mighty king should be born among the Jews, who should govern the whole

world. By these, and such like means, however otherwise they might have been intended by the contrivers, the expectation of some very extraordinary person was raised, and that expectation universally spread, and directed to one and the same place and time. In that place, and at that time, was Christ born. Thus, sir, from the very transgression of our first parents, the means of redemption and salvation commenced in a revelation. A promise was given to our first parents, that 'the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent.' The celebration of the Sabbath, an abhorrence of incest, the practice of sacrificial atonements, and of sacerdotal mediation, with many other notices of the like nature, were divinely revealed, and handed down to posterity. The propagation of these, with the improvement of arts, sciences, and languages, the planting of colonies, the rise and growth of empires, the extensive intercourse occasioned by trade, the warlike expeditions both by land and sea, the general course of conquests, captivities, and political alliances, were all so disposed and directed by Almighty God, as to prepare the world for his Son's arrival. Curiosity and vanity may raise disputes among philosophers, and those disputes create infinite doubts and uncertainties. Ambition and revenge may breed quarrels among kings, and those quarrels make hideous havoc and distraction in the world; yet out of all this confusion shall God bring order. The shortsightedness of human science shall prove the necessity of Divine revelation. The pride, and tyranny, and wars of princes, shall pave the way for true liberty and peace. The philosopher shall dispute, and the commander, though he thinks of nothing less, shall conquer, for Christ; who, though 'he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet hath he now his portion with the great, yet doth he now divide the spoil with the strong.' He gathers where prophets and philosophers have strewed; he reaps where kings have sown. That prodigious empire, which it cost so much worldly wisdom, and labour, and blood, to raise; which was extended from Scythia to Numidia, from India to the British isles; after it hath ten times made war upon him, and persecuted him with fire and sword, he conquers with the celestial armour of truth, righteousness, peace, and the

word of God. We cannot sufficiently admire the wisdom of God in such a wonderful disposition of events, in sending the necessary religion into the world in the most knowing age, when its credentials could be best examined, and its vouchers best recorded; nor his power in supporting it against the united policy and strength of the whole world. But such are the effects, when God works. Occurrences and transactions at an infinite distance shall, by the extensive schemes of Providence, be brought together, and united in his designs. I must now beg pardon, gentlemen, for having so long engrossed your attention; but the topic was fruitful and important; and I assure you, I have given you only a small part of what I could, and perhaps ought to have said upon it.

Temp. An apology, sir, cannot be needed in behalf of that which we have so much reason to thank you for.

Shep. You are very indulgent, and I promise not to trespass so far upon your patience again.

Dech. It is past one, and compliments would be but impertinent, if we had more time. Mr. Shepherd, long as you have harangued, and far as you have gone about the bush, you have still left the greater part of mankind, both before and after Christ, to utter reprobation.

Shep. No, sir, I have left them to infinite Wisdom and Mercy; I have left them to their Creator, who will require no more of them than he hath given them, and who can provide for their salvation by ways and means unknown and inconceivable to you and me. If you can shew me any true religion more efficacious, or more universally communicated to mankind, than the Christian, I am ready to quit that, and close with yours immediately.

Dech. What do you think of the religion of nature?

Shep. I think, after the corruption of that nature, its light became too dim for the discovery of true religion. But, whatever informations it was qualified to give us, it must have made a most unequal distribution of them, in proportion to the great inequality of men's capacities. So imperfect was this light, so feeble and uncertain, that society and civil government could in no country rest upon it; and so unequally was it dispensed to different countries, and different individuals, that, if this is an objection of any

weight, it lies more strongly against natural than revealed religion, and therefore, better fits the mouth of an Atheist than a Deist. Can you give me an instance of any country, in which some, either real or pretended, revelation was not the established religion, and the basis of civil society? Hath any historian or traveller given you any information of a people, who believe in nothing concerning God, but what each man draws from within himself; and who do not follow the customs and traditions of their forefathers in matters of religion? If Christianity came late into the world, what you call natural religion came full as late; and there are no footsteps of natural religion, in any sense of the words, to be found at this day, but where Christianity hath planted it. In every place else religion hath no conformity with reason or truth; so far is the light of nature from lending sufficient assistance. It is strange, that the natural light should be so clear, and yet the natural darkness so great, that in all unassisted countries the most monstrous forms of religion, derogatory to God, and prejudicial to man, should be contrived by some, and swallowed by the rest with a voracious credulity. I could wish most heartily, that all the nations of the earth were Christians; yet, since it is otherwise, we derive this advantage from it, that we have a standing and contemporary demonstration of that, which nature, left to herself, can do. Had all the world been Christians for some ages past, our present libertines would insist, that Christianity had done no service to mankind; that nature could have sufficiently directed herself; and that all the stories told, either in sacred or profane history, of the idolatry and horrible forms of religion in ancient times, were forged by Christian priests, to make the world think revelation necessary, and natural reason incapable of dictating true and right notions of religion. But, as the case stands at present, we have such proofs of the insufficiency of unassisted reason in this behalf, as all the subtilty of libertines is unable to evade.

Dech. If all this, and ten times as much of this sort of reasoning, were admitted, it would only prove, that natural religion is not adequate to the wants of men; but by no means that Christianity is. Now our present question is not about natural, but revealed religion.

Shep. It is very true; but you have already acknowledged, sir, that religion of some sort or other is absolutely necessary to the wants of men. You will farther acknowledge, I believe, that there can be but two sorts of religion, namely, natural and revealed. If then natural religion is inadequate to our wants, revealed must be sufficient; or else you must conclude, contrary to your own principles concerning the infinite goodness and justice of God, that he hath not given us that, which, by the very frame of our nature, he hath made necessary to our main happiness.

Dech. It is enough for me to have shewn, that my religion is universal, and consequently fit for God to give, and answerable to the purposes and wants of men: it is now your time to shew as much in favour of yours, which, I think, you have not yet done.

Shep. I have, I think, shewn, that of all religions ours is the most ancient, the most universal, and the fittest religion to answer the purposes of mankind.

Temp. As far as my little knowledge of mankind carries me, it appears to me, that ignorance of vice and its incentives, does more towards making a people harmless, and preserving them uncorrupted, than knowledge of virtue or its rules. As the nations least acquainted with arts, sciences, and commerce, which spring in a good measure from luxury, are always the best and happiest of people, although their religion be very defective, so revelation, which requires arts, sciences, and commerce, to propagate and hand it down, was, in my opinion, sent to accompany those corrupters of human nature, wherever they went; and to preserve some at least from vice, who might be the cement of society, and unite the rest, whose passions are too highly exalted by refinement and luxury, to be confined within due bounds. This seems to quadrate exactly with the Mosaic account of the fall, which tells us, that knowledge and corruption came together into the world. It agrees also with experience; for the most debauched nations have ever been, and still are, the most knowing. Thus Providence seems, by a wise and wonderful contrivance, to have made knowledge, which brought sin into the world, help to carry it out again.

Dech. The thought is ingenious; but the ancient Grecians and Romans, and the present Chinese, whom we must

allow to have made the greatest progress both in knowledge and luxury, knew nothing of revelation.

Shep. That is more than can be proved. All they knew of true religion they were taught traditionally. As to their corrupt notions and idolatries, you will grant, I am sure, they were of their own invention; and I will insist, they were the inventions of nature degenerate, and reason ill-informed. The Grecians, who were by far the most knowing people of the three you have mentioned, were as gross idolaters as the rest, till Plato's time. He travelled into the east, and came home with better notions of theology, which he derived from tradition, than the other philosophers of his time were masters of. He ran higher towards truth in his sentiments of religion than others; but still worshipped the gods of his country, and durst not speak out all he knew. However, he formed a great school, and, both through his writings and scholars, instructed his countrymen in a kind of religious philosophy, that tended much more directly and strongly to reformation of manners than either the dictates of their own reason, or of their other philosophers. So much of your notion, Mr. Templeton, seems rational enough, that the nature of tradition makes the propagation of religion most easy among those, who stand most in need of a perfect religion.

Dech. If there is no salvation but through the name of Jesus, as we are told in the fourth of the Acts; if faith in the Christian religion, as we are told in many places of the New Testament, is necessary to eternal salvation; all the heathens, who never heard of the name of Jesus, nor of his religion, and all the Jews and Mahometans, who believe in neither, must be damned.

Shep. And if the light of nature be universally clear, and we must act up to it in order to please God, all Heathens, Jews, Mahometans, and Christians, that is, the whole world, must be lost and damned; because they have all, excepting a few Deists, acted against the plainest dictates of nature and reason, in admitting for religion what the Deists tell us from the clearest lights of nature, is downright superstition or idolatry; and, besides, have by their lives and conversations, violated every article of the natural law.

Dech. This is still but the poor shift of throwing the im-

putation of a damning principle off yourselves upon us; whereas it is your present business to clear yourselves. It is impossible, however, to rid your religion of this difficulty: either men can be saved without the Christian religion, in which case there is no occasion for it, or the greater part of mankind must be damned for want of knowledge, which neither was, nor so much as could be, proposed to them.

Temp. Do you really think it impossible, upon the Christian scheme, to lay aside that difficulty?

Dech. Absolutely impossible. The Christian religion says, there is no salvation but through faith in the name of Jesus. This damns all who never heard of that name, unless you will say, that people may believe in a name they never heard of.

Temp. As we see but a small part of the schemes of Providence, so much only as is necessary to our wants, and cannot dive into the secrets of God, farther than he hath been pleased to reveal them to us, he may have ways and means, impossible to be conceived by us, to clear up this formidable dilemma. Ignorant, however, as I am, of what God can do, I think I can point to two possibilities by which this difficulty may be got over.

Dech. As they must be great curiosities, I shall be glad to hear them from so able a divine.

Temp. If the souls of those who died, or shall die, under the darkness of paganism, should be permitted to transmigrate into bodies born under the light of the gospel, your whole impossibility would vanish in an instant.

Dech. You have the finest and shortest way of solving difficulties that ever was heard of. And so you call in Pythagoras to assist Jesus, and in a way too which the religion of the latter can hardly admit of.

Temp. The Christian religion hath nowhere, that I know of, condemned the transmigration of a soul from one human body to another.

Dech. No, nor from the body of a man to that of a beast.

Temp. My other solution for your difficulty seems a little more agreeable to revelation.

Dech. Let us have it, if it be but half as ingenious as the former.

Temp. The most ancient fathers, who best knew the principles of our religion, so understood, I am told, the passage in the first Epistle of St. Peter concerning Christ's 'going by his spirit to preach to the spirits in prison, who were some time disobedient in the days of Noah,' together with some other places of Scripture, as to be of opinion, that Christ, between his death and resurrection, went into the place of departed souls, and there preached the gospel to those souls who had left the world before he came into it; and by that means gave them an opportunity of faith and salvation through his meritorious death. Many of the modern divines, and our church in Edward the Sixth's time, as I found yesterday in Pearson on the Creed, expounded these texts in the same manner, and were of the same opinion with the fathers in this matter: and though the church of England, in Queen Elizabeth's time, did not in its articles require subscription to this doctrine at the hands of its clergy, yet it left them to their own opinions therein, and was far from condemning it, either as erroneous or heretical. Now, sir, if this doctrine be agreeable to truth and Scripture, as it possibly may, for ought you or I know, it will entirely defeat your grand impossibility.

Dech. Very ingenious, indeed! And pray, sir, what provision do you make for the souls of Pagans who departed this life since Christ was among the dead? They seem to have come too late.

Temp. What provision was made for the ages succeeding Christ in this world? Was there not a succession of ministers and preachers instituted to perpetuate revelation? And is it impossible that something like this could have been done among the dead?

Dech. Phoo! Are we to be pestered with parsons and sermons in the other world too? No, no, Templeton, there are no tithes in the other world, and consequently no parsons. Pray, Mr. Shepherd, what do you say to the hypothesis of the learned Dr. Templeton? I fancy you will not much approve of it, because it looks so like new light.

Shep. I say this, that it totally overturns your impossibility, because it is itself possible, and may serve to shew us, that we are not rashly to limit the power of God, or to say what he will, or will not do. His secrets are unsearch-

able. It is enough for us, that he provides for our salvation. Let us leave the rest of his creatures to himself, and not reject his tenders of mercy to us, merely because he hath not thought fit to tell us what he intends to do with others. He hath given you an ample fortune; you will not, I believe, throw it up, purely because he hath not explained his reasons to you for leaving so many of your fellow-creatures in want and distress. He hath given you very good abilities of mind, and great opportunities of acquiring knowledge, by which you have been enabled to discover the law and religion of nature: you will not, I hope, turn apostate to your own principles, because there are many thousands whose natural reason is so weak as to render them utterly incapable of that discovery, and of defending themselves against the craft and incroachments of our priests. The mysteries of Providence in respect to other things, as well as to the dispensations of religion, are as much above our comprehension as those of the divine nature. All things in the moral and political world, as well as in the natural, become inconceivable and unaccountable to us, when we attempt to pry farther than our talents are able to carry us; which is just so far only as our wants require. This deference is paid to the mysteries of government, that the peasant thinks himself unable to comprehend the schemes of his king; and, if he believes him to be a wise and able ruler, he will dutifully acquiesce in his administration, even when it seems to run against his notions of prudence. Yet the peasant knows his prince to be but a man. You, Mr. Dechaine, are still more ignorant in respect to the interests of the universe and the policy of the King of kings. You cannot tell, why the wise and good man, who labours to instruct and reform the world, is persecuted and put to death for so doing, and all his useful knowledge and virtues buried with him in the grave. You cannot tell why the deceitful, the cruel, the abandoned monster is permitted to prosper, to corrupt the world with his bad principles and vices, to disturb the peace of his country with his ambition, to oppress thousands of better men than himself, to wage ruinous wars, and spread death and desolation round him wheresoever he goes. You cannot see so far into the schemes of Providence, nor are you so well acquainted with the government of the world, as to

account for the revolutions of kingdoms, the rise and decay of empires, arts, commerce, and religions, on which the affairs of mankind so necessarily depend. It will be no disparagement to your reason to say, these things are too high for it, too deep for the measure of your understanding to fathom, and too extensive in their connexion with the general schemes of him, who plans and projects for a boundless empire, to be comprehended by so narrow a capacity as yours. But, after all, your difficulty, concerning the impossibility of saving the heathen upon Christian principles, hardly deserves the name of a difficulty; for those sentences of Scripture that seem to condemn them, admit of a more rational interpretation, when applied to those who heard the gospel, and rejected it; which interpretation is more suitable than yours to the charitable and comprehensive spirit of the gospel, and more consistent with other passages of Scripture, that intimate mercy to them, as we had occasion to observe towards the end of our third conference.

Temp. HAVING dwelt sufficiently on this point, I think it is high time to call a new one. Mr. Dechaine, I believe, is not yet exhausted of objections.

Dech. I have all I ever had. I could propose about five hundred more; but as it will be soon necessary to break up for this day, I shall offer one, which is alone sufficient to answer the end of all the rest; and, therefore, I shall conclude with it. People may argue for and profess a thing they are very far from believing. They may have an interest in speaking what they do not think; and provided those they speak to be ignorant and simple enough, they may talk them into an opinion, which they themselves know to be false. But we have a much surer way of knowing the principles of men, than by their words; that is, by their actions. I have dealt largely with people of all ranks and conditions, who call themselves Christians; and that in a country the most illuminated of any in the Christian world: and I never yet found more than two or three among them who acted as if they were sure their conduct must lead them into either of those distant places, which Christians call heaven and hell. I found in some men an appearance of such a faith, and in others I could just discern an almost imperceptible degree

of it; but both this degree, and that appearance, vanished into mere vapour the moment they came to the test of a considerable profit, or a great pleasure, to be obtained or enjoyed at the expense of their religious professions. I have found, also, that the more knowing the people were, whom I had an opportunity of looking into by the open window of their actions, the less Christianity I always perceived within. The wisest statesmen, the ablest lawyers, the deepest divines, were the farthest removed from a weak faith, and the most disengaged from the trammels of the gospel. Now, sir, to confess the the truth, I thought it evident that the Christian religion wanted proof and foundation, since it was able to convince nobody: and I likewise saw it would be a ridiculous singularity in me, to tie up my own hands with a parcel of chimerical hopes and fears, when those of all the world about me were either entirely loose, or only manacled with straws and spiders' threads.

Shep. I know not how it is in the grand world; but sure I am, that in this low and plain world I live in, there are some real Christians.

Dech. Look ye, Mr. Shepherd, ignorant people know nothing of your religion; its mysteries are too high, and its authorities too learned, for their examination; consequently they cannot be Christians: and, as these know nothing of the matter, so their betters believe as little.

Shep. You may possibly have judged a little hardly, or rashly, of the great ones; and I am sure you do of the small. I have conversed with some judicious men, who have spent as many of their days at the upper end of the world, as you have done, and been deeply engaged in a great variety of affairs, as well as you; and although they lament the great corruption, both in principles and manners, which hath seized the court and city, yet they bring down a favourable report of some whom they had tried, and found true Christians, both in head and heart. I, who have often changed my situation, and been tossed about through various parts of England, have, it is true, been much shocked with the great decay of piety and virtue I observed in most places; but then I have been comforted, on the other hand, with the clear sense, and strong faith, and exemplary lives, of great numbers, in all stations and conditions, whom I have been

so happy as to be acquainted with. A man may be very wise in worldly affairs, and ignorant enough in religious matters, to which, if he hath given little or nothing of his time or application, it is impossible he should know much of their evidence; and it is natural he should disrelish the little he does know, if his thoughts and inclinations are turned the quite contrary way, to profits and pleasures, condemned by the first principles of religion. To make such a man as this one's guide and example in things which he is so ignorant of, merely because he is sharp and cunning in other things, is a foolish and a dangerous choice. We do not consult with a lawyer about our health, nor with a physician about our estate, be they ever so sufficient in their own professions. Nay, in things which we can be judges of ourselves, we trust to nobody but ourselves; and such are the merits and differences of religions, that all people can judge sufficiently of them, if they will but give the half of that attention to them, which they do to their worldly affairs. But I observe, there are no sort of men more slavishly led along by example and authority, by vogue and fashion, and those of the idlest sort, than such as pretend most to think for themselves. All they say on this subject is, it seems, but mere prate and cant. They cannot go to heaven, unless it is in such a throng of fellow-travellers, as may bear their feet off the ground, and pull or push them forward by a motion not their own; and because the narrow way is not much crowded with passengers, these Freethinkers, although they pretend to walk in singular and solitary ways of their own, desert it; and, shutting themselves up in the dark vehicle of bad authority, are carried downward, at the discretion of him who drives, the Lord knows whither.

Dech. But, if there is any truth, or real good, in Christianity, surely the clergy must be sensible of it. They are bred to it from their infancy, and must know their own trade: but there is nobody farther from God, than he who lives nearest, nay, than he who lives in, and by, the church. You clergy, Shepherd, draw from the original fountain itself; and, if you have nothing but muddy waters, either for your own use, or that of your flocks, it shews your fountain is not so clear as it should be. The clergy of any religion, as Julian observes, become sureties for the Divinity they pro-

fess to serve, and reflect credit or dishonour on their religion, and its author, according to the good or evil example they set. Hobbes, among other causes of the decay of religion which he reckons up, seems to think the ill lives of its preachers a very material one.[a] And, indeed, it seems most unreasonable, that people should receive such principles from any set of men, as those very men flatly and openly contradict in all their actions. But we have had, you will say, good clergymen in former times, and such as, by mortifying all their corruptions, and dying in our cause, give a glorious testimony in its favour. But, sir, we have only your own word for these enthusiastic sufferings and testimonies, supposed to have accompanied your religion in ages long since past, and vaunted in our own times with a world of pomp and flourish. You tell Deists, that the mortifications and self-denials required by your religion, are what makes libertines of us all. But I am sure any Deist, though of ever so free a spirit, may easily practise as much self-denial as our good orthodox Protestant clergy do; and that, you will grant, must be enough for the mere purpose of being a Christian. I must own, were the 'new birth' to be taken strictly and literally, as, they say, that mad-cap fellow Whitefield understands it, and not allegorically, as, I hope, all sound divines interpret it, this would be a most frightful doctrine; and we Deists could not, in that sense, be Christians. But, as the Christian duties are qualified and lowered by the practice of the clergy, I think it is no difficult matter to live like a Christian, and pass muster among the very best of you. But the world will not be always amused. 'It is most true, that the ill lives of the clergy everywhere, their pride, hypocrisy, rage, and avarice, contribute too evidently to hurt religion, which they thus disgrace, and seem not to believe. Hence all their reasonings for it, especially where with such reasonings they confound their own selfish principles, are despised; and some people may perhaps come to doubt the being of a God, because they who call themselves his ministers, live and act as if they thought there were none.[b] If clergymen would avoid contempt, let them avoid the causes of it; let them not be hunting after honours, courting pre-

[a] Leviathan, chap. 12.
[b] Ind. Whig. vol. iii. Exam. &c. of Bp. of Chichester's Sermon.

ferments, and bustling for riches; let them not join in factions, and foment rebellions; let them not brave heaven by swearing falsely; let them not make slaves of the people, nor encourage tyranny in the prince. Let not those of them who gratify brutish appetites, and live in sensuality, add want of shame to their want of grace, and bewail the contempt they meet with, while they are deserving it. Why should they, of all men, be exempted from censure, whose employment swells a fault into a vice, and a vice into a crime? The sanctity of any calling, instead of cloaking or excusing, exposes to utter detestation the bad behaviour of him who fills it. I do not know by what judgment or fatality it comes to pass, that if you but touch the pretences or vices of the meanest ecclesiastics, so many of their body is in an uproar. Touch a galled horse, and he will wince, though it is in order to cure him. The eleven apostles lost no part of their honour when Judas hanged himself; nor would any honest clergyman, though ever so many of the other sort did the same, or if it was done for them.[c] The first holy messengers (for that I take to be the highest apostolic style) brought with them their proper credentials, in their lives, their manners, and behaviour, as well as in powerful works, and signs from heaven. And though, indeed, it might well be esteemed a miracle in the kind, should our present messengers set up to represent their predecessors in any part of their demeanour or conversation;'[d] yet sure I am, they cannot reasonably expect we should reverence them as God's ambassadors, nor regard their dictates as the revelations of God, till, by their lives and conversations, they put on some resemblance of the Master they pretend to serve. Now, it is not the exterior habit of their employment, that will give them this resemblance, or produce them any regard with reasonable people. 'They can challenge no respect by their habit, when they have forfeited it by their behaviour. There is no holiness in garments. A black gown has neither more understanding, nor manners, than a black cloak: but if their dress is the flag of their commission, and they actually have God's commission in their pockets, and yet will engage in another service; what name and treatment do they

[c] Ind. Whig, vol. i. No. 3. [d] Shafts. Charact. vol. iii. p. 336, 337.

merit! Can men succeed to the apostles with the qualities and behaviour of apostates? A clergyman who is as bad as an ill layman, is, consequently, worse. In a sanctified character there is no medium between doing good and doing mischief; since the power of example is stronger than that of precept.'[e] What is it hinders Christianity from spreading, in either the East or West Indies? Is it not because the polite and rational Chinese, Japonese, &c. cannot digest its mysteries? Is it not because the honest and uncorrupted Americans cannot like a religion professed by the wickedest of men? Were it any way helpful towards virtue, say they, 'those who know its principles, and bask in its light, would not be so apt to go astray.' Now what the Americans say of Christians in general, the laity say here at home of the clergy. Thus mysteries in the east, Christian vices in the west, and clerical vices all over Europe, bear down your religion, which now stands in more need of miracles to support it, when so many of the clergy desert or betray it, than it did of old, when its preachers, they say, were better men. No laymen, ambitious of rising in the world, can serve the times with more assiduity, than you clergy. In all our revolutions and changes of government, the clergy are ever among the foremost to quit their principles and oaths, to fall in with the new system of politics, and take the advantage of the tide, in order to make a good voyage to preferment.[f] It is, no doubt, a great argument of your sincerity, that so few among you dare preach or speak out your old notions of Christianity, but basely give them up, as opinions of no truth or moment, and betray them by guarded and evasive expressions, or by a prudential silence, when libertinism is making such prodigious strides upon you, lest you should seem to go against the current, and thereby prevent your own promotion. It is at the expense of what was once taken to be Christianity, that many of you rise to opulence and grandeur; and yet you would have us travel in the narrow thorny road! But why do you not shew us the way, gentlemen? You say you are in the narrow way: it may be so; but then I am sure it is well mended since Christ's time, if it can be travelled in a coach and six, and hath

[e] Ind. Whig, No. 41.

[f] See An Account of the Rise and Growth of Deism, and Ind. Whig, No. 43.

palaces for inns all along. You tell us a thousand fine things of heaven, as often as you get into a pulpit: but when you come down again, this little contemptible world, which you have been declaiming against, and declaring war with, even serves your turn, as well as ours. St. Evremont says, he 'doubts the persuasion of a preacher, who promises the kingdom of heaven in every sermon;' and yet 'solicits, with the greatest eagerness, for some paltry benefice.' No sort of men in his neighbourhood live, in general, upon better terms with Paludes, than the Papists, Dissenters, and Deists: he gives them no opposition, never once enters into religious debates with them, nor labours to defend his flock against the successful encroachments of such as make proselytes to any of these parties; but if any one is tardy in the payment of his dues, or carries his reluctance into a law-suit, then it is that the zeal of this excellent divine, this pastor of Christ's flock, this father of the church, flames out in its full lustre and vigour: then who such a disputant as he? Who hath the church, and the interest of religion, so often in his mouth, as Paludes? For in what does the welfare of the church, or the true interest of religion, consist, but in the punctual payment of great and small tithes? So many of you are of the same turn and spirit with this gentleman, that Paludes is rather the term of a species, than the name of an individual. There is a most observable difference between the warmth, with which your dues are contended for, and that exercised by you for the support and credit of Christianity. This I must take the liberty to tell you, that if you sincerely believed in the Christian religion, you would be more solicitous about your conduct, and its honour. But although it is the church, rather than religion, you are all so anxious to support; and you are apt to cry out, on all occasions, 'The church is in danger;' I must remind you, and you ought all of you to hear it with both your ears, that nothing can endanger it so much as your own misbehaviour. But what said a great dignitary, when somebody made this observation to him? 'Why,' quoth the worthy father, 'I believe the church will last out my time.' Was it not honestly said? Another would, on the like occasion, have either endeavoured to vindicate the clergy, or have bewailed the ill carriage of his brethren, as if he had himself

a right to throw his stone. What a scandalous trade is driven upon the wealth of the church, which our bigoted ancestors, in the blindness of their zeal, dedicated to the service of religion! Blood, recommendation, and flattery, are the means by which promotion is arrived at. Is this owing to a disregard of merit and standing? or is it owing to a want of merit sufficient to distinguish such as ought to be raised in the church? When Hooker's book of Ecclesiastical Polity was shewn to the pope, and he was told how poorly the author was provided for; 'I am not afraid of that church,' said he, 'which neglects such men as Hooker.' I need not expatiate on a remark, so much fitter for the meditation of those who steer the church. The education of the clergy is the chief cause of all that bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and pride, that so remarkably distinguish them from other men;[g] they are trained up entirely by clergymen, as it were, to a craft, or trade: they are confined to one track of notions, and never suffered to look beyond the contracted system of prejudices, with which they are obliged to furnish their minds, into any thing that breathes the air of freedom. The bulk of them make little or no proficiency even in this false kind of erudition; and yet expect, when they mount the pulpit, to be heard with as great deference and resignation, as if they were uttering oracles. You will hear one of those fellows, attempting,

> Though no wiser than Waltham's calf,
> To speak on God's behalf:

defending Christianity with demonstration upon demonstration, and accounting for the mystery of the Trinity with an explanation no less difficult to be understood than the thing itself. Those of them, on whom nature hath bestowed a talent, come out from the dugs of their Alma Mater with a sort of learning, worse than ignorance itself, because it is fitted only to mislead or embroil the world. Were I a bishop, before I would ordain one of this stamp, I would administer to him a large portion of a certain root, which the old natives of Virginia were wont to give to all candidates for the priesthood. Its operation was very surprising: it totally deprived the youth, to whom it was given, of all his former

[g] Ind. Whig, No. 5.

ideas, passions, inclinations, and aversions, which might have rendered him unfit for his holy employment; and gave him a fair piece of white paper within, on which notices, more refined and useful, might be transcribed from better heads. After this, if I gave the candidate any instructions at all, he should have a parson and a Deist for his tutors, to the end that his now untinctured understanding might have an equal balance, on both sides, to keep it trim.

Shep. A very fine preparation for the priesthood!

Dech. In short, Shepherd, such, and so flagrant, are the vices, the hypocrisy, the avarice, the pride, and the ignorance of your order, that although they should all preach by glasses, each of them large enough to contain a hogshead of sand, and measure their defences by the gallons of ink exhausted in them; they would never be able to make the wiser part of the world believe, they had either any faith in, or regard for, Christianity. If you believe in the Christian religion, you would have some tenderness for its credit; and were you not determined to insult over the bigotry and tameness of the world, you would never persevere so serenely in such enormities as I have only touched on with too much tenderness, and in the general; when you are sensible, the world all about you is shockingly particular in its censures of the clergy; and, from railing at them, proceeds to question the truth of what they preach. Now, sir, you may begin and prove, in your demonstrative way, that the clergy are saints or angels; but you must excuse me, if your rhetoric should prove too weak for my senses and experience.

Shep. On the contrary, sir, I shall defend them no otherwise, than by reminding you, that they are only men, men of like infirmities with yourself; and even by beseeching you to think of them with less admiration, than I find you do; for surely you cannot make them a higher compliment, than implicitly to form your own principles by the weak and unguarded part of their conduct. I perceive, Mr. Dechaine, you have acted like a skilful orator, and reserved your strongest argument against Christianity, which consists in ridicule and raillery, for the last. Nay, what you have here objected to the behaviour of the clergy, derives still greater force from fact and truth, than from the keenness of your invective; inasmuch as some things you have charged us

with, are too notorious to be denied, and too flagrant to be excused. There is no one thing the Deists oftener object to Christian writers, than the uncharitable and the ungentlemanlike acrimony with which they attack their adversaries. But who, among us, ever railed at the most virulent and disingenuous of our adversaries, in such a style as yours, or in such a speech as this you have huddled together, the substance and turn of which, I observe, is common-placed out of the most celebrated books on your side? How insensible is the assurance of those men, who, while they rail and bespatter with the greatest bitterness, and in the coarsest language, rail at nothing so bitterly, or so abusively, as the liberty they themselves are taking, if but nibbled at by their opponents. This is acting like a certain justice of the peace, who swore a thundering oath that he would set a poor fellow in the stocks, for only swearing a petty one. Among other things, you charge the clergy with state-perjury, by which you can point at nothing else but their taking the new oaths at the late revolution; but could that revolution have ever been brought about, had not the generality, of both laity and clergy, thought themselves discharged of their former oaths to king James, by his trampling on the coronation oath, and thereby unkinging himself? The nonjurors were Papists and bigots, because they would not swear to queen Mary and king William; and those that did were traitors and Atheists. I hope you can give better proofs than this, of your attachment to the present happy settlement. Are the Deists really angry at the revolution? And could nothing have given it to us, but perjury? This I am sure of that neither the pope, nor the pretender, could have laid down a better doctrine to prevent or reverse it. Your objections to the education of the clergy have something in them that puzzles me not a little. You would not have them educated by clergymen; and why? Because they will be apt to imbibe the notions of their tutors. This they will do in the same measure, educate them who will. They are therefore to have no education. But perhaps you will allow them a little. Where? At the dancing-school, or the temple? If the barristers are to breed the clergy, let the clergy breed the lawyers. The reasons for the latter are, at least, equal to the reasons for the former; and they are neither

more, nor less, than this, that the professors, in any branch of knowledge, are always the most unfit persons in the world to teach it; because they will certainly instil their own notions into the minds of such as are committed to their care. How much were it to be wished, that the professors of all sciences would make it a rule to instruct their pupils in principles directly contrary to such as they themselves take for truths! You charge those with partiality, who fill the vacancies of the church, and make this an argument of their unbelief. This is a high compliment to Christianity; for it must be your opinion, that if they were really Christians, they could not be partial; and that, in order to act the part you ascribe to them, they must be libertines and Deists. What I have suffered by the partiality you censure, was so remarkable, that no one can be more unfit to speak to such a subject. Should I seem to join in the censure, you would ascribe it to resentment; and should I offer at a vindication, you would charge me with speaking in the prudential strain of an expectant; so that, either way, all I could say to you would pass for nothing. All men, who have principles of religion and honesty, act in some things, and on some occasions, against those principles; for men are but men. None but the most flagitious actions, can argue the infidelity of the agent. Before we attribute the partiality of those, who govern the church, to an utter want of principles, let us impartially examine our own consciences, and perhaps we shall find, that, notwithstanding our principles, we have been sometimes led, through human frailty, and by the customs of the world, to act as they do. If this should be the case, it will become us to be silent, and to acquiesce in that which Providence, and the laws of our country, permit. All bishops do not act the part you accuse them with, and such as sometimes do, often act otherwise; and, in either case, are almost equally liable to censure, through the defects of those they promote. The eyes of the selfish and ill-natured world are on the well-beneficed clergy; all their slips are marked and magnified; while such, as are stationed a little lower, are less observed, less envied, and therefore less maligned. Had it pleased some bishop to advance me from my present obscurity, to a post more lucrative and conspicuous, he might, for ought I know, have been charged with par-

tiality, and, by libertine detraction, even with infidelity, on account of my miscarriages. But if the misconduct of a bishop, in one respect, shall call his principles in question; why may not the faithful discharge of his duty, in another, be allowed to prove, with as much weight, that he is really a Christian? I know some in that order, who, when they have good benefices to dispose of, can no more forget their friends, nor divest themselves of natural ties, than other men, on the like occasions; who nevertheless, throughout all the other parts of their conduct, shew a charity towards men, and a piety towards God, that can proceed from nothing else but a true sense of religion, and a real adherence to its principles. If the mere partiality of one professing Christianity, shall be sufficient to prove him an unbeliever, surely the enormous crimes of one professing Deism, ought to convince us, that his professions are altogether hypocritical, and that he is a real Atheist. If men are to be thus unmercifully censured, although we can neither see into their hearts, nor into the reasons of their conduct: there is an end of all benevolence or charity. We must first be wiser and better men ourselves, before we thus presume to usurp the prerogative of God, and sit in judgment on the behaviour of others.

Dech. Consider, Shepherd, no bishop hears you; and therefore you had better keep this apology for the ears of their friends, who may report it to your advantage another day.

Shep. I speak not, sir, to apologize for that, by which I have suffered; nor to flatter the bishops into kinder sentiments of me, who am already provided for to my present satisfaction, and who renounce all claim to their notice, discharging them, before God and man, of the smallest obligation to think of me, when they are dispensing their favours. The observation, with which you closed your speech about our order, to wit, that our ill behaviour brings our faith in question, and strikes at the credit of Christianity, hath somewhat exceedingly alarming in it to the ears of a conscientious clergyman; and, I must own, hath but too much foundation in fact and truth. Were the world made up of sensible and inquiring people, the conduct of the clergy would be a thing of little consequence to any body

but themselves; because, in that case, every one would rest his assent on his own researches and examinations into the truth of our religion itself, and not blindly pin his faith, whether libertine or Christian, on the wicked or misconceived behaviour of another. But as the bulk of mankind, even of the great vulgar, as well as of the small, are incredibly careless, and inattentive to religious inquiries; and, what is still worse, prone to infidelity, and looking out sharp for fuel to inflame their loose dispositions, catching at occasions of disbelief, and incentives to their vices; a clergyman owes no duty more indispensably, either to God or his people, than an exemplary life and conversation; because nothing can so strongly tend, as the contrary, to corrupt an ill-inclined, and mislead an unwary world. A bad clergyman is a net, spread by the enemy of human virtue and happiness, for the feet of heedless men: when I think of this, I am filled with horror at the thoughts of that behaviour, by which the more unworthy part of the clergy refute their own sermons, and, while they only talk for God, act for his enemy. My horror rises in proportion as I carry this reflection still nearer to my own conscience, and consider, how often I, a messenger of God, and a teacher of others, have been false to him, in neglecting to press and enforce his message, and a stumbling-block to them, by means of my many indiscretions, and, what is worse (I blush and tremble when I confess it), by my abominable, by my repeated sins, which, I have but too much reason to fear, may have prompted some of those who know me, to such doubts about religion, as they were ready enough to entertain of themselves.

Temp. O! Mr. Shepherd! I believe you have as little reason to reproach yourself for the example you have set, as some others have to boast of theirs.

Dech. He knows himself better than you do, and would not, for nothing, thus puritanically reflect on himself.

Shep. It is most true; and all the consolation I have to combat this frightful reflection with, is, that my poverty, and littleness in every respect, may possibly have rendered me too inconsiderable to have been much observed. If my low situation, and narrow circumstances, have blessed me with this happy insignificance and obscurity, I shall therein

think myself much more fortunate than all the wealth and grandeur of the world could make me. I see religion suffers a worse persecution under those who preach and betray it, than it ever did under a Nero or a Dioclesian. They vented their fury on the bodies, but we wound the souls of Christians. The blood they shed impregnated the world with faith and heroic virtue; but our vices are labouring to extinguish both in the breasts of mankind. I wish, indeed, sir, that I, and all the clergy in the kingdom, were every day to hear such a lecture, as that you just now delivered, on the subject of our behaviour, and its consequences. But why do I wish this? We know such things are bellowed about in all places; nay, they are often thundered in our own ears, not only by the enemies of our religion, but by our ecclesiastical superiors, and those among the laity who have its interest most at heart; and yet, as if many of us were possessed with some spirit of infatuation, it makes little or no impression on them.

Dech. No; for, 'hearing, ye cannot hear.' But to what end is this hypocritical lamentation over the decaying, or rather expiring, principles of your religion, when I and all the world know, your sorrow is not for the principles, but the profits, not because religion is sinking, but the church is in danger?

Shep. I did not want this proof to convince me you are no searcher of hearts; and that you only censure mine, by one you are better acquainted with. Religion, sir, is the soul of the church.

Dech. And is about to forsake the body, and to depart this life.

Shep. We may indeed say, with truth, that the church is in danger, while religion is so coldly regarded by numbers, whose immediate office it is to support its spirit and reputation. While the adversaries of the church are sapping its foundations, and firing upon its most combustible parts with red hot bullets, how many of its watchmen are fast asleep! how many instruct the enemy where to point their batteries, and are opening its doors to others, too like themselves, who enter for no other purpose, but to make plunder of its wealth! I can compare the present state of our religion to nothing so justly, as to that of a ship at sea in a

dreadful storm: the wind and thunder beat furiously on it from above, as if heaven were angry with its crew; the waves toss it to and fro, with infinite violence; and the deep from beneath opens its frightful mouth to swallow it up. It is surrounded with other vessels, which, insensible of the common danger, or rather despairing of their own safety, conspire, with the tempest, to destroy it. In the meantime, its sailors are, some intoxicated, some asleep, some diverting themselves below, and some sauntering about on deck, as if they were in the midst of a calm, and had no enemy in sight. The passengers curse the crew, and call to the enemy to take them on board.

Dech. And surely they are in the right. A hulk in such a condition must inevitably perish.

Shep. The preservation of religion, and the church of Christ, never depended wholly on men: its first preachers were, in themselves, altogether unqualified to stem the opposition they met with, or promote so forlorn a cause. Its advancement was a universal and glaring miracle, performed in the sight of all mankind; and its preservation hitherto against the strong current of human corruptions, against the treachery of its professors, and the malicious cunning of its adversaries, is another standing miracle in its favour, that gives us sufficient assurance of God's protection, pursuant to his promise, for the time to come. Your invective against the clergy, useful as it may be to Mr. Cunningham and me, might have had a better effect on us had you appeared to be less prompted by rage and prejudice against our order, and had you not been carried beyond the limits of truth by your resentment. We are not all profligates, nor all contemners of our duty, and betrayers of our master; whereas you have lumped us in one promiscuous censure, which evidently demonstrates there is something more at the bottom of your aversion than our mere misbehaviour. Besides, you bring against us a general charge of hypocrisy, which contradicts what you say about our open defiance against your censures, and our serenely insulting your tameness with a contemptuous perseverance in our vices; nor does it less contradict experience and common observation.

Dech. I am sure you cannot safely appeal to experience for an openness of behaviour in the clergy. Do not they

herd together, and live apart from the laity, as if afraid of being observed? Are they not ready, on all occasions, to screen the very loosest of their brethren, as if conscious of a like depravity in themselves, that may some time or other require the same indulgence?

Shep. This charge might fall with the more weight upon us, were we not accused by the same persons who bring it, with a want of brotherly love and charity for one another. How shall we act when opposites, although both are far enough from being carried to extremes, are criminal in us? If we sometimes converse a little too much with one another, are we not often driven to it by the unkindness and disdain of our lay-neighbours? Do we never stand up for one another but in the wrong? Is no clergyman ever falsely and maliciously traduced? Or when he is, ought the rest of the clergy to join in the cry? It is natural, and useful too, for persons of the same profession to be often together, and to be warmed with some affection for their brethren. You gentlemen of the law are, to the full, as apt to run into both these practices as we; and it must be your opinion, as well as ours, that neither practice is culpable, but when the one is employed in the defence of the unworthy; or the other, in contracting our hearts, and rendering them pedantically alien to other men, and to the common sentiments and affections of human nature. The clergy of our church are far enough from combination, and, indeed, as far from hypocrisy. There never was less worldly prudence shewn by any set of men, in concealing their faults, than by them. The truth is, they despise your censures; and those of them who are bad, being lost to all sense of shame, or tenderness for the credit of their office, are in no sort of pain about the remarks of mankind on their conduct. I know of no hypocrites among them but those who lean to new light and libertinism, and, by that treacherous advance towards you, betray Christianity to Deism: yet these base and disingenuous wretches, whom you know to be false to all their own solemn subscriptions and declarations, are almost the only men among us whom you will deign to speak favourably of.[a] Although we are generally too strongly tinctured

[a] Ind. Whig, vol. iii. p. 226. Peele's edit. printed in 1735.

with the bad principles and corrupt affections of the degenerate age we live in, yet there are those of us who act with a becoming regard to the sacred importance of the high trust reposed in them by their master. There are still some, both among our bishops and inferior clergy, who, bad as the laity is, out of whom we are made, and partial as the methods of promotion may be, by which men rise in the church, do labour faithfully by their writings, preachings, examples, and charities, in the cause of Christianity, and for the good of mankind. The profits of the church invite all sorts of people into it, and those most, who are most attached to gain; while its doors, nay, its windows, stand open to all intruders: and those who are too filthy to be let in, either at the doors or windows, creep in through the sinks, and place themselves, with all their pollutions about them, at the altar. These worthy asserters of Christianity being placed in a strong light, and a most conspicuous point of view, by their scandalous behaviour, furnish the enemies of religion, who desire no better, with strong arguments against it; and, being placed so near it, the shots that are made at them, which are always sent home with good will, pass quite through, and wound religion. Don't laymen make the bishops and deans, with a prodigious number of the lower clergy? And they, we know, are swayed, in respect to the promotions they make, wholly by interest or recommendation. I should rather have said, the laity make all the clergy; for they make those who make the rest; and, considering that they choose them out of their own uncorrupt and virtuous body, it is strange they do not fill the church with better men; and stranger still, to hear them so severe in their censures of a clergy, chosen out of, and constituted by, themselves. One indifferent clergyman, having got into the church, pulls in another; and the very men who themselves led in the first of the uncouth train, are among the foremost to vilify religion, because the parsons, of their own introducing, do not cease entirely to be laymen, in the very porch of the church. The lay patrons, who have the disposal of many benefices, too often sell them to the vilest of men, whose consciences are wide enough to swallow the oaths against simony; or give them sometimes to undeserving relations or servile chaplains, who have made their court

by cooking religion to the squeamish palates of their masters; and when they have done, rail at the vices of the clergy, and charge them upon Christianity, as if they were so many proofs of its imposture. If these things were seriously considered, it would almost seem a miracle that the clergy are not more corrupt and unworthy: yet I will be bold to say, they are as much superior to the laity, in piety and virtue at this day, as they were in the first and purest ages of Christianity. If the clergy are fallen greatly from their former height of fidelity and purity, as indeed they are; it must be owned, the laity have fallen still lower in proportion, and left the same, if not a greater, distance between them and their clergy, in point of goodness, than in any former age of the church.

Dech. But the clergy, instead of growing worse, as we do, ought to grow better; for the blinder and weaker the traveller is, the greater need he hath of a faithful and able guide. Notwithstanding this, the present age is so unhappy, as to depend on guides, who know less of the way to heaven, than those they pretend to lead, and are less able to endure the fatigues of the journey. I must own, they know more of Christianity than others; but as they practise less of it, what are we to conclude, but that by their greater insight into it, they have found out its weak side?

Shep. If there are people so weak as to make the good or evil behaviour of the clergy their chief argument for or against religion, they would do well to examine that behaviour with the utmost attention and candour; they ought by no means to entertain either a good or bad opinion of the clergy, as they do of other people, from favour or aversion, upon slight surmises, or casual reports. One of these weak people should ask himself, Whether his ill opinion of the clergy arises from within himself, or the report of others? if the former, he should next consider, whether he actually knows such clergymen to be ill livers; and if he does, whether it follows, that all the rest are as bad as those of his acquaintance. But, if his ill opinion be founded only on appearances and surmises, he should look well, that he have no temptation from within himself to think ill of the clergy: for, should he have any private cause to hate them; should he, for instance, grudge them their dues, or have had a quar-

rel with some of them; this might make them much worse men, in his opinion, than they really are; and his ill-grounded spite might render him an apostate to a true religion. But, should his disrelish to religion make him think the demands of the clergy unreasonable, and should that opinion render the persons of the clergy odious to him, and, by that means, increase his distrust of religion, as it so often does; he should consider how miserably his mind imposes on itself, by suggesting only a part of this fallacious circle at once; which, could he comprehend it all together, he might easily see both its deceitful nature and dangerous tendency. If, on the other hand, his ill opinion of the clergy is founded only on common fame, he ought to consider how unsound a bottom this is for principles of any consequence. The pride, ill-nature, and envy, of mankind, are apt to make them speak hardly of one another, and that without a strict regard to truth; the clergy, of all men, are treated with the least ceremony, by common fame: more is expected from them than other men, and more, indeed, than man is able to perform. Nobody is afraid of being called to account for what he says of men in gowns, and therefore is less tender of their characters than he is in relation to the characters of other men, who have swords to defend their reputations. There is no room for a middle character in a clergyman. If he is not a saint, he is a devil. If he neglects his duty, he is deservedly despised as a drone, that will eat, but not work; if he is strict in the performance of it, he is impertinent with one, troublesome to another, and assuming, in the esteem of most people: if he courts and cultivates the great ones, he is a time-server and a parasite; if he freely reproves their vices, if he arraigns them before their own consciences in private, or publicly before the world, he is impudent, malicious, and slanderous: he is a mere bully in a gown, who vents his private resentments under the protection of his office, and a pretence of zeal for his duty: if, for fear of offending, he preaches in a distant and general way, he is despised as a coward, or one who regards his own safety more than God and religion. If he, in any measure, depends for his bread on the good-will of his people, the beggar cannot speak freely to the giver, without offending him, and starving himself: if he is supported by

a legal income, and pretends to exact his right, as laymen do theirs, by law, he is a covetous and litigious oppressor, a sort of sturdy beggar, who sues people for their alms. To minds prepared by these, and such-like considerations, to think ill of the clergy, a small fault, or the appearance of a great one, is extremely agreeable; it furnishes them with a pretence for ill treatment, and subtraction of dues; is blown as far as the strong breath of envy and calumny can carry it; and is made a reason, in distant places, for distressing the parson, Now, the clergy of our church suffer more by calumny than those of any other church: the Papists know the church of England to be the bulwark of the Reformation, and therefore level all their spleen against its clergy: the Deists know, that Christianity depends on instruction; and therefore propagate a thousand ill stories, no matter whether true or false, of its teachers; and point them all as arguments against religion itself: the Dissenters have no other way of raising themselves but by pulling us down; and this brings them into the cry against us: the gentlemen of estates look with a wishful eye upon the tythes, and the common people, vainly imagining that, if the clergy were deprived of all right to the tenth of their labour and increase, they would get them to themselves, join in representing them as the worst of men, in hopes that a general odium may at length grow into an act of parliament to exempt them from the claims of the clergy.

Temp. I must own, there is a great deal of truth in your observations on this subject; and surely it concerns you all to have them perpetually before your eyes.

Shep. It would require a most diligent and exemplary clergy to weather such a storm, pouring from all sides on the church, and beating against religion itself: yet our clergy, generally speaking, take no more care about this matter, than if they had neither enemies from without, intent and preparing to strike at them; nor weaknesses within, to render them vulnerable. The most sorry sort of men are admitted to holy orders, and even sometimes promoted to the highest places of trust. Nor is the error only in the first concoction: as promotion follows interest, as in respect to the wordly views of a young clergyman, it is all one to him whether he be diligent or idle in his business, sober or loose in his behaviour, so he hath no discipline (at

so low an ebb is ecclesiastical jurisdiction) to stand in awe of. Suspensions, censures, deprivations, degradations, &c. as if there were no occasion for them, are almost wholly laid aside: so while neither faithful services are rewarded, nor neglects and scandals punished, it is no wonder if there are many unsound members in the ministry, for its enemies to lay their teeth on, for men of wit to make a jest of, and for men of art to set up as representatives for the whole order, and as arguments to silly people against religion. Even honest and well-meaning persons, who are sorry to see religion so shamefully betrayed by those whom it supports, are carried away with the general voice, and the loud clamour, to fix their eyes on the monstrous characters of our order, and to overlook those shining ones that appeared as great lights to the last generation, and those through which the brightness of the gospel breaks out with glorious lustre on the present. It is very hard, that the virtues of good clergymen shall be allowed to reflect no honour on their order, while the vices of the bad bring an odium on the whole, and even suspicion on religion. Let the candid part of the world judge, from what hath been said, whether all the ill things, reported in the present times of our clergy, are likely to be true; nay, whether the most of them are not to be suspected of falsehood, and ascribed to the ill-temper, and libertine disposition, of the age. Let them seriously consider whether an ordinary clergyman would not, with the same behaviour, make a good layman, or 'squire. Let all those clergymen, Mr. Dechaine, be assembled, who are on a level, in rank and fortune, with the generality of the quorum. Go to this assembly; shut your eyes——

Dech. Yes; that you all require of us, as often as we have occasion to interfere with you.

Shep. Well; but shut your eyes, as I said, lay your hand, at random, upon the first clergyman you meet, and take off his gown.

Dech. Right; I am confident he will deserve it.

Shep. You are so keen! dress him in a lay-habit, and give him a temporal fortune, equal to the income he had in the church; and suppose him to live, now he is a 'squire, exactly, in all respects, as he did when a parson; would he not be remarkable, among laymen of the same rank, for a

sober, regular, and, at worst, decent behaviour? His not swearing, his not wenching, his not getting drunk, his not fighting, his not jobbing in county affairs, nor trafficking in perjuries, on the one hand; and on the other, his charity shewn in money to the poor, and good advice to the ignorant; his honesty in all sorts of dealings, his punctual payment of debts, his humanity to his servants and other dependents, and his regular attendance on the duties and ordinances of religion; would make him a very singular sort of a 'squire, and go fair, I am afraid (pardon my vanity), to render him the butt and laughing-stock of all the other 'squires, as often as ever he met them, either at the assizes or sessions.

Dech. And pray, sir, do you think it sufficient for a clergyman to be merely decent and legal in his outward behaviour? Is it enough for him to be but one small degree better than the generality of laymen?

Shep. By no means: but, all things considered, I think it wonderful the clergy are not worse than they are; nay, that they are not as bad as they are represented. Although there are many good and conscientious men among them, yet it cannot be denied, that there are also many, of whom, to the concern of all good Christians, it may be truly said, that they are, as you intimate, but one degree better than the laity. They abstain, indeed, from greater crimes, and behave with a decency and reserve, not common among their lay-brethren; but this is only a small part of what their important function requires of them: a bare neglect, which in other posts would be but a peccadillo, is in theirs a crime. Great knowledge, and strength of reason, are necessary to the defence of a religion, so artfully attacked; great industry in spreading its principles, among an ignorant and inattentive people; great resolution in rebuking the infidelity or wickedness of those who call themselves the better sort of people; great charity and tenderness, when the wants of the poor are to be inquired into, and provided for; great virtue, and prudence of conduct, when every slip is sufficient to make an infidel or two, even among people who pretend most to a fair inquiry in the merits of Christianity. It is not bare decency, and mere honesty, that will discharge this sacred and weighty duty.

A zeal for the glory of God, and the salvation of souls, should warm the heart; and a contempt for the world raise it above the many difficulties that clog the discharge of a parson's duty, and frighten worldly and dastardly minds from the performance of it. Such spirits as this, God be thanked for it, we have still among us, although, I am sorry to say, we cannot furnish out a very long list of them: but all this is needless talk; for be the professors of religion, whether lay or clerical, what they will, religion, in itself, is neither the better, nor the worse, for their virtues or vices.

Dech. You must pardon me, sir; a religion, that does not mend the lives of its professors, is not worth the supporting; and therefore, I am sure, it is as little deserving of belief and credit. For how can we suppose a set of notions to come from God, that are of no use to man? Now, if my observation fail me not, Christianity is not only useless, but many ways prejudicial to the world, as I have already shewn.

Shep. Suppose the clergy as bad as human infirmity can render them, or spleen and malice represent them; yet this can in no sort affect the credit of religion, with sensible and candid judges, who know that the truth or falsehood of religion is internal, and independent on the good or bad lives of its preachers. Hobbes, Shaftsbury, Toland, Tindal, and the authors of the Independent Whig, who, with an infinite degree of spleen and malice, laboured to represent the clergy as the worst of men, and then employed the hideous picture, which their own prejudices had drawn for them, as if it were an argument against Christianity, at the time they did it, knew, full well, that the ill behaviour of the clergy was no proof of unsoundness in our religion, although they, as well as smaller libertines, might have been, at first, tempted to infidel suspicions by that very means; but afterwards, upon furnishing themselves with what they took for better arguments, they still thought that which had introduced their minds to a most agreeable species of liberty, might be of yet greater force to effect the same in weaker understandings, who might take it for a real argument. It is for this reason that all those honest gentlemen, and all their party, have ever been careful to push home

this fallacious, but popular argument, in the mask of a mere invective, as their most deadly weapon. Pray, Mr. Dechaine, does the bad life of a clergyman really prove his religion to be false, in your opinion?

Dech. It really does.

Shep. Surely, then, the good life of another must prove it to be true?

Dech. Not at all, sir; the case is very different. A man may be good, from a mistaken and enthusiastic principle.

Shep. And may he not be bad, upon mistaken principles, too? Error, I should think, is more favourable to vice than to virtue. You set out with saying, we are to judge of men's principles by their actions. If, upon that maxim, a bad man's actions prove his principles to be bad, the virtue of a good man must, for the same reason, convince us, that his principles are good: nay, the proof, in the latter case, seems to be much stronger than in the former; for bad men may, in obedience to passion, act directly against their real principles; whereas good men, in doing well, have their passions to oppose, and therefore can act on nothing else but principle. Your way of arguing is big with contradictions, and proves our religion to be both true and false: and as all men do sometimes good, and sometimes bad actions, it proves every professor of Christianity to be both a firm believer, and an absolute infidel. But it is no matter to any man, what the opinions and tenets of another may be, or whether he believes what he professes, or not; it is not upon such sandy foundations, as either the apparent or real notions of others, that we are to build our sentiments, in a matter of the greatest consequence. If the clergy were all good, this alone would not prove their principles to be true; nor, although they were all bad, would it either prove them insincere in their professions, or their principles erroneous. It is not so we examine any other branch of knowledge: the intemperance of a physician does not hinder us from conforming to the regimen he prescribes us, for the recovery of our health, provided his prescription appears, in itself, conducive to that useful end. We do not call the justice of the law in question, merely because we see a lawyer, who makes a fortune by it, transgressing it in many instances. This whole

argument is founded on too high a respect for the clergy. You do not consider them as weak and fallible men, who, near as they lie to the fountain of Christian light, may really be blind as to its truth and excellence; and, good and firm as their principles may be, may nevertheless be often led aside by the corruptions of a frail and untoward nature, to actions which those principles severely condemn. In consequence of this slavish prepossession, you wretchedly compliment them with an imitation of all their faults, which greatly outdoes the original. Deism is but the spurious spawn of the clerical vices. Were the clergy such men as they ought to be, there would be few Deists in the world. But I confess they are not; and it is no wonder, considering the circumstances the church is in.

Dech. Spleen! spleen! You are not promoted, and therefore all goes wrong; whereas, were you in a higher station, we presume you would be a strict conformist to the general practice, and contribute as much to the propagation of Deism, as another.

Shep. It is possible I might; and that may be the reason why God, who sees not only what men are, but what they would be, in case their circumstances were much altered, in compassion to me and others, keeps me where I am. Be this as it will, I must insist on it, that, were it not for our great defects, as well as your own dispositions to a loose and vicious life, you would all be Christians, although perhaps no saints: all your other ingenious arguments against Christianity would fly before a virtuous clergy, and hide themselves in silence. The darkest and most abject bigot to the clergy, only takes up principles on their recommendation, which they sometimes contradict in their actions. But then he hath sense enough to see, that those principles are conducive to his real happiness. The Deist, on the other hand, infinitely more blind and slavish than he, thinking the parson can neither be mistaken in principle nor practice, pins his faith, his stupid negative faith, on the mere exterior conduct of a parson: and though he hates and despises him, as an impudent sponge upon religion, and a traitor between God and man; yet he so admires his understanding, and thinks him so deep in the secret of imposture, that he may be safe enough in follow-

ing wherever he goes, though the poor man is conscious all the time, that he is going headlong to destruction. But he, who is capable of being deceived in this pitiful manner (and the great reasoners, the Freethinkers, the thinkers for themselves of these times, are all so), desires to be deceived; for no man would follow such a guide, and in such a path, that was not in great distress for delusion, that might not truly say, 'I loath virtue, I love vice, I dread the judgments of God; come hither somebody, and deceive me.' There are many men who take holy orders for bread, or in obedience to their parents, or because they are unfit for any other employment, with no one qualification for the office, but the mere faith of a Christian. As their reason is seized by faith, so are their wills, on the other hand, by worldly affections, or wicked habits; and as the latter command the principle of action, the former is kept down, and lies dormant in such a manner, that its very being becomes doubtful. Thousands of laymen have experienced this in themselves; and those who are ready to suspect the faith, on account of the immoralities committed by clergymen, would do well to recollect the many instances of crimes swallowed by themselves, against faith, knowledge, and the checks of conscience, or, if they be libertines, against the clear light of natural religion and law.

Dech. Were a clergyman really a Christian, I cannot conceive how he should come to be vicious or profane in his conduct. A person set apart, in the most solemn manner, to be both a guide and an instructor to others, who is every day preaching, praying, and handling the holy mysteries; who knows his conduct, if only indecent, not to say wicked, must be highly prejudicial to religion, and the souls of his flock; cannot be a profligate, without being an Atheist.

Shep. If by a profligate you mean one guilty of the most scandalous vices, I don't know but your observation may be just. But if you understand by the word, no more than such an idle and loose behaviour, as passes without much censure in a layman, I believe a clergyman, who leads such a life, may nevertheless be a Christian, merely in point of historical faith. If a man goes into orders, with no higher degree of faith than this, chiefly for the sake of bread or

preferment, I cannot see how we can expect a much more Christian life and conversation from him than from another, no better principled, who is still a layman. To expect an extraordinary degree of virtue from a man, after going into orders, who made but a sorry sort of a Christian before it, shews but too great a reverence for the spiritual power of a bishop, and the laying on of hands. But mighty expectations from the efficacy of religious ordinances are often pretended by libertines, that the real effects may seem the less. As the purest stream must become foul, if it falls into a quagmire, so the most excellent religion falling into a degenerate age, and passing through corrupt and sacrilegious hands to a loose and dissolute people, must undergo appearances extremely different from those in which its true genius would shew itself, were it duly pressed home, by a diligent and exemplary ministry, on a well-disposed and reclaimable people. Pray, gentlemen, do you think it impossible for a man, on any occasion, to act against his principles?

Dech. No; but I think the general tenor of a man's actions must shew his principles, or nothing can.

Shep. This rule does not hold. There are men, whose general conduct runs directly against reason and conscience; yet we cannot say they are wholly void of reason, nor perhaps entirely free from compunction. It is not easy for those, who are continually wielding the unanswerable arguments for our religion, to doubt of its truth; but many of them have sufficient latitude of mind to make room for that, and at the same time for loose desires, and worldly affections, without much hazard of their interfering. They can afford a distinct chamber to each, and quarter them at such a distance, that faith shall seldom reprove vice, or vice disgust faith. Their minds, divided by many partitions, may compliment religion with the assent, as with the state-apartment; while other lodgings, more convenient for action, and more in the way of business, are assigned to avarice, ambition, or pleasure. The mind of the plain man is more simple, and less capacious; and therefore his faith, his will, his desires, are all entertained together in one room, where having an opportunity to incorporate, and

growing into a singleness of heart, they become one uniform spring of action.

Dech. This allegorical way of accounting for the consistency of good principles with bad actions in the same man, is a little too intricate and laboured. It is much easier to conceive, that the ill life of a clergyman is owing to his contempt of natural religion, and his distrust of the revealed.

Shep. Such a conception may, I own, be very easy to one who is determined to consider nothing in a bad clergyman, but his bad actions, and will give no attention either to the better part of his behaviour, or to his death-bed remorses. Allowing, however, that such a person hath no principles, it cannot be inferred from thence, that Christianity is destitute of sufficient evidence, since ignorance, inattention, or corrupt affections, may render a clergyman as incompetent a judge of that evidence as any other man. Our religion, considered in itself, must have an inherent truth or falsehood of its own, which neither the virtue nor immorality of its preachers can change. Nor can their belief, any more than their practice, add any thing to its real truth, or even its external evidence. It may be false, though they believe it. It may be true, though they should distrust it. It must be either the one or the other, independent of their sentiments about it. The clergy, in these remote ages from the promulgation of the gospel, are no witnesses to its truth, which was sufficiently attested by its first preachers, who saw the miracles wrought in confirmation of it, and vouched for them by the greatest virtue, and with their blood. Shall then the ill lives, or the supposed infidelity, of some among its present preachers, prove that religion to be false 1700 years after its introduction into the world, which the strict virtue and heroic deaths of so many lay as well as clerical martyrs, who lived and died for the faith, proved to be true, at the only time when it was possible to prove it either true or false? It cannot be said, either that the miracles, by which it was proved to the apostolical age, were done in a corner, or that the records, by which that proof is handed down to later ages, are concealed by the clergy. You gentlemen have as free access

to them as we, and can, as easily, examine whether they are authentic and sufficient.

Dech. Well; but have not the clergy more leisure, and better opportunities of knowing, whether the religion they preach be true or false, than other people? Are we not, therefore, to lay a greater stress on their inquiries than our own? And how are we to guess at the secret result of that inquiry, but by their lives, which, to common sense and reason, speak out their real sentiments of the matter much more plainly, than their preaching?

Shep. It is very certain, that the clergy, generally speaking, are much better qualified for the search of religious truths than their lay brethren. Yet as those who bear hardest on the clergy, and are most apt to disbelieve the Christian religion, have fortunes that afford them education, leisure, and books, it is a shame to hear them say, they form their sentiments, and govern their lives, by the scandalous behaviour of two or three sorry parsons. Is it thus they disdain authorities, explode musty opinions, beat out new paths, and think freely for themselves? What is it to them, whether opinions are held by others or not; or whether the multitude be with them or against them? Their piercing eyes can look through the ambiguous merits of the most controverted point. Surely understandings like theirs cannot be tempted in the least to doubt of Christianity, because a parson, so infinitely beneath them in every respect, lives as if he did not believe it. Nay, would it not be a sufficient obstacle to their believing in it at all, if they thought such a wretch had taken the way of them in the faith? But if the vices of one clergyman can turn a man of this stamp into an infidel, why should not the virtues of another convert him again? Or, if the degeneracy of the clergy in this age and country, is capable of driving him from religion, it is but reasonable, that the exemplary lives of that order, in another, should bring him back. Why shall not the good parsons have their stroke at the shuttlecock, as well as the bad ones? But I fear it would be to little purpose. The good parsons, indeed, may strike, and strike with a force not to be resisted by reason; but what will this avail, since the bad, being seconded by all his passions and desires, may

easily drive him down the wind of his own prejudices against the virtues of ten thousand saints and martyrs? As you, Mr. Dechaine, are sufficiently furnished for a fair inquiry into Christianity; and as it is a matter of some importance to you, why should you not look into it yourself? Ought you not to have good reason for rejecting it, and not poorly depend on examples, which you may mistake, which although they were worse than your opinion of them, could neither prove that those who set them are infidels, nor that, if they are, you ought to be an infidel too? You don't act so weakly in other things. It is no argument with you, that money is of no value, because you see another idly squander it away. No, you judge for yourself, and esteem it according to your own experience of its use, though perhaps there does not go quite as much of it through your hands, as through those of your prodigal neighbour. Is it not strange the clergy should have such credit with you, as men of deep penetration, that some among them cannot be idle or wicked, but you must immediately conclude Christianity to be an imposture? Let me advise you, Mr. Dechaine, to lessen your respect for the clergy, for I see you are still an errant bigot to them. Let me beseech you candidly to examine, and, if you find reason for so doing, openly to reverence the religion they preach, notwithstanding the contempt that may be due to their persons. Do and say as the people did, who fell down before the ass that carried the image of Isis, 'Non tibi, sed religioni.'

Dech. No, parson; the asses shall never see me on my knees before them, either out of respect to them or their burden. All you have said, sir, and ten thousand times more, will not be sufficient to convince me that the ill lives of you clergy is not a demonstration against the truth of your religion. Words can never preponderate when actions are placed in the opposite scale. Your harangues pass for no more with me, than those of a mountebank, who once advised me to buy his ointment for sore eyes, when his own eyes were in a worse condition than mine. No spiritual quack, Mr. Shepherd, shall have leave to tamper with the eyes of my understanding, till I see the success of his skill and medicines on the distempers of his own, and of his

heart. His vices will ever prove him a cheat to my judgment, and demonstrate all his fine talk to be mere cozenage and priestcraft.

Shep. I cannot help that; but this I am confident of, that if the clergy are as bad, as your opinion speaks them, it is a strong argument for the divinity of their religion.

Dech. It would be a fine sophism that could prove that; but I observe most of the arguments I have offered against your religion, are in your opinion, and by your way of turning them, entirely in its favour. If the vices of the clergy prove the truth of Christianity, you will one of these days convert us all, and make a duty of being wicked; and the fellow, Templeton, who is minister of your parish, will be a most able defender of the faith.

Shep. Pray, sir, is not the cause most able to support itself, which maintains its ground with the fewest foreign aids?

Dech. I believe it may.

Shep. And if it is most powerfully and artfully opposed, at the same time that it is feebly, or hardly at all, defended, is not this a great argument of its natural strength?

Dech. Perhaps it is.

Shep. Now I insist, that if the clergy are such as you represent them, interested, luxurious, idle, ignorant, hypocritical, &c. the cause they have in hand, since it still keeps its ground, must either be supported by an Almighty power, or by its own internal excellence and truth. A cause so artfully and so vigorously opposed, and so scandalously betrayed; a cause with bitter, and vigilant, and powerful enemies, and none but false friends, must stand upon some foundation of its own, if it stands at all. Our religion must indeed have been long ago borne down by the weight of its false and dissolute professors, were it not for a divine strength that holds its head above water, with this millstone about its neck.

Dech. It may be strong enough, for ought I can tell; but its strength seems to be like that of a little man whom I knew, and who could lift a thousand weight, but it was a wonder to every body where his strength lay.

Shep. Sir, my argument is fully answered, as all arguments must be, though ever so serious and solid, if they can

be jested with. Lord Shaftsbury hath laid this down for a rule, and therefore it must be so.

Dech. Were your religion of Divine appointment, God would either have so contrived it, as that it should have stood in no need of a ministry, or at least, that its ministry should have been in no danger of falling into bad hands. But I think it nonsense to say, that a true and universal religion can depend on teachers, especially such as may neglect their duty, and by their ill behaviour bring its truth in question, say it were even among ignorant people only.

Shep. Some true religion there must be, and there can be but one. This religion must be fitted to the wants of men, and ought to be universal. Now amongst all the religions hitherto known or heard of, there never was one, which did not require to be taught and learned. Your religion, you say, is that of nature, and universally known without teaching. Yet the world hath been always trusting to real or pretended revelations, and knew nothing of an untaught religion, till about a century ago, that some Deists began to set up a new one, which, if we believe themselves, needed not to have been taught, because every body knew it before. Although, however, mankind wanted only to be reminded of this internal religion, its apostles have not been able to make us sensible we have any such thing within us. They tell us there is no need of being taught it, since the light of nature hath done that already, without trouble or charges; but they refute themselves in the very telling; for, if we had such a natural and spontaneous religion within us, there would be no occasion for their putting us in mind of it, nature itself doing that for us, as well as for them.

Dech. You will not suffer nature to do any thing for you, or at least for those, who will listen to you. The internal senses must be suppressed, and reason vilified, that your artificial lights may seem necessary, and be taken off your hands at the greater price.

Shep. And you, to save expenses, which is just as selfish in you, as the desire of a maintenance is in us, run down the light of revelation, and prove it useless by no other argument, but an assertion, that nature is a sufficient instructor; and this experience contradicts. As to our suppressing the internal sense, or the light of nature, I deny both the attempt,

and, upon your own principles, the possibility of the fact. We insist on and argue from nature, as far as she lends us any assistance; and if her light were so universally clear and strong, as you represent it, no endeavours of ours could ever extinguish it, and those least of all, that fall in with it, and inculcate a system of principles most agreeable to nature. If the light of nature cannot be extinguished, why, in the name of wonder, am I to be taught that, which the teacher tells me I know already? The teachers of Christianity act a more consistent part; for, as to that religion, they acknowledge it absolutely necessary somebody should teach it, in order to our knowing any thing of it. It is also necessary there should be some people to administer its sacraments to us; for we have no right to take the gifts of God in any way, but that by which he hath thought proper to hand them to us. Now he did not think fit to do this by a ministry of angels; but chose, for reasons which he was not obliged to assign us, to give us men like ourselves for ministers; who, although they may err like other men, have it not in their power to change the nature, or lessen the authority, or render of no effect the ordinances, of our religion. The knowledge of some religion being absolutely necessary to us, and there being no religion which teaches itself, we ought to have instructors, set apart from other employments, to take care of us in a matter of so great concern. Were there no set of men, whose peculiar business and duty it is to study, to transcribe, to translate the Scriptures, and often to call us from our worldly affairs to hear the word and will of God, that word would, in a little time, become useless and unknown; and religion, running in the foul channel of oral tradition only, would undergo great alterations and corruptions from the inventions of men, which you affect to dignify with the title of the natural light. The teachers of our religion have this great advantage over those of yours, that they can prove, or can say at least, that they are sent and impowered by God to teach; whereas yours cannot even say they are either sent or authorized by him, since they maintain, the principles they teach are universally known already, and taught by nature herself.

Dech. ENOUGH, I think, hath been said to support the last article of our creed, by which we anathematize all revelations. I have allowed you a full scope to declaim; for your right to a livelihood was at stake. But your laboured apology, which, I perceive, hath had an unaccountable effect on Mr. Templeton, was far enough from making any impression on me, and perhaps as far from satisfying yourself. Every objection I have made to your religion, was sufficient to shake its very foundations, although no other had been urged; but all united, and built on the arguments for the light of nature, which prove a revelation needless, they amount to a demonstration subversive of revealed religion. This, Shepherd, you are, I verily believe, as sensible of, as I am; but you will not own it, for reasons already intimated.

Shep. I do confess, sir, a pound of feathers is as heavy as a pound of lead. But you must excuse me, if I tell you, that I dare not take your feathers off your hands, at the weight you say they amount to in your demonstration-scales. If no single objection is sufficient to make me renounce my religion, the union of ten thousand such will not impart a demonstrative force to any one of them; and therefore, all put together, they will not be able to convince me, or any other reasonable man. You may make a French triumph after every battle, go it as it will; and I, for my part, who did not dispute for victory, will sing no *Te Deums*. But there is one thing worth telling you, which I believe you had no notion of.

Dech. Well now, what is that?

Shep. You have been, during all our conferences, disputing most strenuously for the Christian religion.

Dech. How say you! for Christianity! Have I been all along disputing for Christianity, Templetou?

Temp. I thought not.

Shep. You have offered a noble proof in its favour; and you Mr. Cunningham, will, I am sure, take it as a compliment from me, if I say you have helped your friend to make this proof a little stronger than otherwise it would have been. The immediate followers of our blessed Saviour saw numberless miracles wrought in confirmation of their faith,

from whence they derived this advantage, that they trusted to their own eyes, and not to the report of others. But to make us, who depend chiefly on the most authentic reports, some amends, other proofs for the truth of our religion are afforded us, which the first Christians had the benefit of only in part, and which bring our faith up almost to an equal certainty with theirs. Our Saviour foretold the bloody persecutions which his disciples were to undergo in after-times; and he likewise prophesied of the prodigious progress his gospel was to make among mankind. No mere strength of conjecture could have enabled him to foresee these strange and improbable events; and those who did not long outstay him in the world, could receive no full proof in favour of his mission, from the completion of these prophecies, which were not entirely fulfilled till several ages after their deaths. But they, as well as that concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, have since been verified by events, which they fit as exactly, as if they had been wrote immediately after those events. This sort of proof adds prodigiously to the grounds of our faith; and, while there are so many Christians in the world, we, by means of the prophecy concerning the progress of the gospel, afford one another every day a demonstration of its truth.

Dech. I cannot see how this proves I have been all day arguing for Christianity.

Shep. I shall not long keep your curiosity upon the stretch. Christ foretold, that the Jews should suffer great tribulation, such as never happened from the beginning of the world to that time; that they should be led captives into all nations; and that 'their city should be trodden down of the Gentiles, till the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled.' St. Paul, pursuing the same prophecy, says, 'Blindness hath in part happened to the Jews, till the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, and then all Israel shall be saved;' intimating, that the dispersion and obstinate infidelity of the Jews, were great promoters of the conversion and faith of other nations. This prophecy hath been verified by a fact, visible to all the world, in every age since it was uttered. Jerusalem was trodden down; the Jews have been led captives into all nations; blindness in part hath happened to them, for they have always retained the worship of

the true God, but have rejected Christianity; 'their casting away hath proved the reconciling of the world, and their diminishing, the riches of the Gentiles;' for to this day they every where verify this prophecy, than which nothing can speak more strongly for the truth of our religion, not even excepting the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning our Saviour, which those very Jews, averse as they are to Christianity, preserve genuine, and explain or translate over the whole world to all, who have any curiosity to hear what their sacred books contain.

Dech. How well he proves me a strenuous defender of Christianity!

Shep. This prophecy concerning the Jews hath so great analogy to that in which St. Paul and St. Peter speak of you, that I could not help introducing the one by the other.

Dech. Of me!

Shep. Yes, sir, of you, and all our other libertines. Our Saviour foretold, that 'false prophets,' which signify the same as false teachers, 'should arise;' and St. Paul prophesied, that 'the time should come, when men would not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears.' St. Peter gives a prophetical character of the teachers, who, by their novel and seducing doctrines, were to rub the uneasy itching ears of the aforesaid hearers. 'There shall be false teachers among you, says he, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them; and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of; they through covetousness shall with feigned words make merchandise of you. Presumptuous are they, self-willed; they speak of the things they understand not, beguiling unstable souls, who have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor. They are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest, who, when they speak great swelling words of vanity, allure through the lusts of the flesh.' To finish this prophetic picture, and give it the last heightening touch, after which it cannot fail to strike, he says, 'There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts.' This prophecy hath this day been literally fulfilled. The time is come,

'when men cannot endure sound doctrine,' but run from teacher to teacher, till they can light upon some one, who will entertain them with new notions and doctrines, pleasing to their lusts; some one, who can assuage their just apprehensions of a future reckoning, and give them a sort of licence from God to live as their nature dictates, that is, as they please. People, who know so well what they would be taught, can easily, in an age and country so luxuriant in novelties and refinements, accommodate themselves with teachers, who privily steal into their minds those 'damnable heresies,' which both the teacher, and the taught, are ashamed openly to own; who teach them 'to deny the Lord that bought them;' who proselyte them to the 'broad way,' and fill their mouths with bitter scurrilities against 'the way of truth;' who impose upon them with double expressions, and feigned words, till they have insinuated the first principles, from whence their doctrines, which would have shocked, had they been proposed all at once and openly, are by degrees to be slily deduced, and the whole mystery of iniquity unfolded, leaf by leaf, as their poor deluded disciples can conquer the misgivings of their consciences. Never were teachers more exactly characterized. 'Presumptuous are they, self-willed.' Here the conceited self-sufficient doctrine, that sends us to ourselves for our laws, that would have us think our understandings well enough enlightened, without any instruction, and turns us loose to the dictates of our own wills, is strongly and plainly pointed at. The peculiar turn of our libertines in railing and gibing, instead of arguing, on points which they will not be at the trouble of considering, is closely and literally expressed, by 'speaking evil of things they understand not.' Their getting in with young raw gentlemen, who are yet unfixed in principles, and prone to loose pleasures, is as properly set before our eyes, as words can do it, by the expression, 'beguiling unstable souls.' Their being compared to Balaam, who spoke in the name of God, but had his thoughts intent on gain, carries a very strong allusion in it to a set of men, who, for mere worldy profits and pleasures, to rid themselves of religious restraints and tithes, turn the light of that knowledge they have received from revelation against it, and fight it with its own weapons. They are each of them, if we believe themselves,

a living fountain of religious knowledge, that borrows its waters from no other source or stream, as having plenty of living and native waters springing perpetually from within itself; but when we go to draw from these fountains, we find 'they are wells without water,' as St. Peter calls them. It is hardly possible to figure to us a dark and whiffling mind, driven here and there by every gust of appetite and passion, which is, I think, a notorious part of the libertine character, better than by a 'cloud carried by a tempest.' And, to complete the whole, if they happen to be engaged with any one in a dispute about religion, the sole tendency of their arguments, if it is seen through, appears to be nothing else, than an endeavour to justify themselves in 'following their own lusts,' and to draw others into a course of life like their own. As arguments for such a purpose are not to be had in sufficient plenty, a supercilious look, a contemptuous grin, ill-natured ridicule, and profane ribaldy, serve their scoffers as well, or better, than arguments; for the persons they choose to make their attacks on, are more apt to be affected with a jest, than a reason.

Temp. You forget one circumstance, that seems more especially to point this part of the prophecy at the present times; and that is, the having erected ridicule into a criterion for the deciding of all disputes, particularly those that relate to religion, morality, and politics.

Dech. Nay, if the prophecy looks so directly this way, there is an end of the world; for it says expressly, that these scoffers shall come in the last days. Be so good, Mr. Templeton, to let me know whether the grand assizes are to be held on Saturday or Sunday next.

Shep. The prophecy would lose a considerable argument of its truth, if you did not make a jest of it.

Temp. I protest, Mr. Dechaine, it is not a little strange, that, after fair warning, you should compliment St. Peter with such a testimony.

Shep. Not to detain you any longer on this prophecy, I shall conclude with one remark more: whether the gentlemen, pointed out by it, are victors or vanquished in any dispute about religion, they always make a formal triumph on the spot, and brag wherever they go, how cleverly they refuted, and how unmercifully they mauled, the adversary.

But I should have expressed it better, if I had used St. Peter's way of describing it, by 'speaking great swelling words of vanity.' Thus, sir, I think it is plain, you have been for many hours employed in a practical defence of our religion, and stooping under the cross of Christ

Dech. I understand you very well, sir, and your prophetical ill manners. Now that we are at the close of all our silly conferences, pray, Mr. Shepherd, do you not think I have had a world of patience? Bless us! what a mass of stuff I have been listening to, for I know not how many days! I never did, and I promise you, never will again, drudge in such a heap of rubbish.

Shep. I own your patience, which is very delicate on the side towards religion, hath undergone some trials. I wish, however, it could hold out for another day; for as you have taken unbounded liberties with us parsons, and on many occasions severely flouted at our sermons, it would be but just to allow me the same privilege of censuring the apostles of libertinism, and their performances.

Cunn. You had as good let them alone.

Temp. I think, Mr. Shepherd, after what hath passed to day, hath a right to be heard on the topic he proposes for another conference.

Dech. All he desires is an opportunity to rail at better men than himself, and to mangle with clumsy criticisms the works of authors, who wrote with a politeness above his taste, and with a depth of reasoning beyond his understanding. A fine critic, indeed, for a lord Herbert, a lord Shaftsbury, a Hobbes, or a Tindal! My patience is exhausted. Adieu, parson.

Temp. Mr. Shepherd, I hope, if I come to see you sometimes, I shall not be troublesome?

Shep. Sir, your visits will give me the greatest pleasure. Gentlemen, farewell.

DIALOGUE VIII.

TEMPLETON, SHEPHERD.

Temp. BE not surprised, Mr. Shepherd, to see me here again, and alone: the other two gentlemen, having no stomach to any farther conversation with you, did all they could to dissuade me from this visit. After having sufficiently lectured me, during a course of nine or ten years, on the necessity of opening my eyes, and thinking freely for myself, they shew on this occasion, that all they aimed at was only to lay me open to their principles, and shut me up to those of Christianity. The end of thinking freely is, to find out truth; whereas all the use they apply it to is, to rid themselves of their old principles, and to beat out new opinions, without the least regard to the truth or the falsehood of either.

Shep. Can this be called free thinking?

Temp. Not, indeed, without a great abuse of words: for a man may shew the bigot, as well by a blind attachment to new opinions, as by a stiff and senseless adherence to old ones.

Shep Most surely. The mind is enslaved, when it is hindered from following reason in a search after truth. Now it may be thus enslaved, as well by vanity and corrupt passions, to new notions and inventions, as by prejudice of education, to old hereditary errors. Either way, a falsehood is imposed on it under the semblance of truth, and truth itself is kept out of sight.

Temp. Well, sir, if through vanity, and in order to a life of sensual pleasure, I suffered my too easy mind to suck in loose principles, I hope I shall be forgiven, as advantage was taken of me in that stage of life, when I had strong passions, and little judgment; provided I now, in a greater maturity of reason, sincerely set myself to the pursuit of such principles as may approve themselves to my unbiassed judgment, and, with a manly force of mind, reject those that have nothing more to recommend them, than their soothing the sensitive part of my nature.

Shep. Have you so far ejected the prejudices you lately laboured under, as to make room within you for principles that may possibly lead to self-denial?

Temp. I have, if I can judge of myself.

Shep. It is almost as difficult to judge rightly of one's self, as it is to postpone a prejudice that pleases, to a principle that restrains and mortifies.

Temp. The utmost I can boast of, as to that, is a thorough diffidence of myself, and a full conviction that I stand in equal need of instruction, in order to enlighten my reason; and of restraint, in order to subdue and govern my passions.

Shep. Nothing farther is wanting on your part, but to use your reason in guarding against erroneous instructions, whether from me, or any one else; and to apply to that infallible instructor, whom Socrates and Plato wished for; that gracious guide and governor, whose bridle is strong enough to restrain the brutal part of your nature, and yet too light and gentle to gall it.

Temp. I want and desire his assistance, as much as Alcibiades did.

Shep. That young nobleman had, for his master, the wisest heathen that ever lived: yet you may easily judge, by his debauched and irregular life, that, notwithstanding his great talents, and many excellent qualities, the violence of his passions made something more convincing and powerful than philosophy, necessary to him.

Temp. Nothing can be more evident; and I, for my own part, am satisfied, that, had I been the pupil of Socrates, as he was, I should have gathered enough from the lessons of my master, to make me despise and, perhaps, profane the mysteries of Ceres, as he did; but not enough to find out a religion sufficiently qualified to command my respect, and make me a good man. For some years past much art hath been used to tincture me with certain fashionable opinions, to which, till I had the happiness of your acquaintance, I was but too well inclined: you have not only shewn me the unsoundness of those opinions, but opened my eyes a little, in respect to the unfair dealing of those who have had the management of my mind. I wish you would go a little farther, and, pursuant to the intention you intimated at the close of our last conference, give me your censures on the arts and

writings of our libertine apostles. This, I foresee, would have a good effect, and is all I can wait for now, being obliged to leave this country in a few days; but not without a scheme, which I shall mention to you before we part, for bringing us often together, or, rather, uniting my dear Mr. Shepherd so closely to me, that nothing but death shall be able to part us. If this pleasing attention of mine takes place, I shall have leisure to use his assistance in forming a right idea of Christianity, to which I see its author, and its nature, have made instructors, in some measure, necessary.

Shep. I should be the most unworthy of men, if I did not comply with any request, or enter into any justifiable scheme, for the satisfaction of a person who makes the most acceptable sacrifice to truth, and does me the honour to ask my poor assistance in offering it up. But I am afraid the matter proposed for the subject of our present conversation is, as Mr. Dechaine intimated, above my capacity; besides, it opens so wide a field, in which the particulars to be taken notice of, lie in so great confusion, that the whole day will scarcely afford time for a cursory view of it.

Temp. It is now but six of the clock, and I am determined to stay with you till the evening, provided you will dedicate this one day to my farther satisfaction. Be assured, good sir, it is somewhat better than a mere curiosity that obliges me to be thus troublesome to you.

Shep. If our conversation may be, in the least, either entertaining or useful to you, I shall think the day, or week, that is laid out on it, a very great happiness to me.

Are not there many things, Mr. Templeton, which it highly concerns us to know, of which, however, we cannot have a competent knowledge, without instruction?

Temp. There certainly are, not only in religious, but in other kinds of knowledge.

Shep. In respect to such, yet unknown, but knowable matters, may not a man have too low an opinion of his own natural talents, so as to neglect the right use of them, and his opportunities?

Temp. Yes; through indolence, too great diffidence in himself, or attention to other things, he may overlook a branch of knowledge which well deserves his pains, and to-

wards the acquisition of which his own reason might lend him great assistance, at least as a check on the instructions he might receive, in order to that acquisition.

Shep. If such a one, neglecting the means of knowledge that are placed within his reach, should give himself wholly up to the tuition and guidance of others, what would you think of him?

Temp. I should think such an implicit resignation might as well put him into the way of error, as of truth.

Shep. There are a thousand to one on the side of error; for to any branch of knowledge there is but one path of truth; whereas the bye-paths of error, in respect to that branch, are various, and may be infinite. This man, then, shuts his eyes, and is led, he knows not whither.

Temp. His blindness is both deplorable and culpable, in the highest degree.

Shep. Such is the extreme of self-diffidence. Opposite to this there is another extreme, as prejudicial to truth. Are there not some things, which, by the strength of our own natural faculties, we may arrive at the knowledge of?

Temp. Yes; and many more which may be known with a very little assistance.

Shep. What would you think of him who, finding himself able, without instruction, to acquire knowledge in some things, should immediately fancy himself above the necessity of an instructor in all things?

Temp. I should think him highly conceited.

Shep. And suppose, because he can make some small progress by himself, for instance, in religious knowledge, he should take it into his head to think he is arrived at the utmost limits of theology, and that neither God nor man could carry him farther; what notion would you have of him?

Temp. I should think him not only the most conceited, but the most presumptuous, of mankind.

Shep. Such a person as this, through a high conceit of his own abilities, and settled contempt for the understandings of other men, will learn nothing, believe nothing, and trust to nobody but himself. It is easy to see, that, from this species of pride, nothing is to be expected but a profound ignorance, gross mistakes, and a dissolute course of life. The men who fit this character, in a country of liberty,

and a debauched age, form a large class; of whom a few put their talents on the rack of invention to furnish themselves with matter for shew and parade: for nothing can set off the man of parts to such advantage, as great sagacity and knowledge, displayed in new and surprising notions, which, it may be thought, he could not have borrowed from either men or books. The rest, having no thirst of knowledge, and as little vanity, neglect the use both of their own natural talents, and of other men's instructions, and set up for freethinkers, although they do not think at all. Bigots shut their eyes, in order to be led by others; but these wink, and stumble forward, feeling their way only by repeated bounces against vice, and miserable encounters with all its shocking effects.

Temp. If you had, at any time, made one among this sort of men, you could not have characterised them more exactly, in my opinion, who have had but too much reason to know them.

Shep. THE spirit of libertinism being that which distinguishes the present from all former, and, it is to be hoped, will distinguish it from all future ages; it will be necessary to have a right idea of that spirit, in order to judge, as we ought to do, of those whom it animates. The libertine spirit cannot be better defined, than by one word, to wit, self-sufficiency.

Temp. A definition in one word!

Shep. If you recollect what passed in our second, third, and fourth dialogues, you will be convinced the definition is just and full; sufficiency furnishing the genus, and self the specific difference.

Temp. I took notice of your using this term in our debates. Whether it contains a strict definition, or not, we need not stay to examine: but, I must confess, a whole volume, wrote on purpose to set forth the nature of libertinism, could not have conveyed to us a more perfect idea of it. All its various signs, characters, modes, and effects, proceed from, and centre in, self-sufficiency. It is, indeed, a self-instructing, a self-governing, and a self-pleasing spirit. The libertine hath abundant light, religion, law, and obligation, within himself: he needs no other guide, no other teacher, no other lawgiver nor governor, but himself,

his own sufficient self. The knowledge of religion and morality he borrows from none, but is, in respect to both, an independent and perfect being: hence proceed his exalted notions of himself, and hence his pretensions to unbounded liberty of thought and action. Were it not blasphemy, I should wish to be a libertine, who is certainly something more than a demigod. What an injury you have done me, Mr. Shepherd, in humbling me to Christianity!

Shep. Your irony hints to me the origin and progress of libertinism, which it will not be amiss to take a short view of, because it will serve extremely well, to illustrate our definition.

Temp. I am impatient to hear it.

Shep. Libertinism is by no means a novelty. You will, perhaps, be surprised to hear me say, it is older than the world.

Temp. Indeed!

Shep. It was self-sufficiency made the devil aspire to independency: he thought himself too wise, too great, and glorious a being, to be any thing less than God. He said, 'I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will be like the Most High.'

Temp. Nothing, in all revelation, seems more astonishing to me, than that an angel, so full of wisdom, of purity, and goodness, who so well knew the infinite power of God, should, in heaven itself, become a rebel to that power.

Shep. Of his fall we can have only a very imperfect idea; of the fact, revelation gives us a full assurance, while moral evil and misery vouch but too plainly for its probability. Every being, subject to an excess of pride, is destitute of reason and wisdom, knows no superior, and is impatient of all control. Eve was tempted to transgress the commandment of God, by the very arguments and inducements suggested in every libertine book: the devil insinuated, that the prohibition laid on her, which was purely positive, was the effect of mere will and arbitrariness; that to eat the forbidden fruit, was really for her good; would open her eyes, she being, as yet, kept in the dark by her fear of God, that is, by her religion; would make her wise, like God, that is, knowing good and evil, of herself; and, to finish the temptation, that the fruit was good to eat, and

would give her great pleasure. The devil, through the woman's fondness for pleasure, and curiosity, infused his own pride, and love of independency: hence it was that conceit, affectation of knowledge, and inordinate love of pleasure, became the source of all sin; and it is worth observing, that, in proportion as those dispositions render any one self-sufficient, they, to this day, render him also corrupt and wicked. The mother of mankind, having eat the forbidden fruit, became self-sufficient, and was qualified to be a teacher of libertinism to her husband; upon whose compliance, he, for the first time knew evil, so as to distinguish between that, and good, which was all he knew before. Thus it was that mankind were introduced to something more than mere moral knowledge, and were made, to their cost, and in a wrong sense, self-sufficient. The sacrifices of Abel were better received than those of Cain: the pride of Cain could not brook this preference, although the effect of infinite wisdom; but, swelling him with self-sufficiency, put him upon arraigning God of partiality, and murdering his brother. Were not Korah and his company, very self-sufficient, when they said to Moses and Aaron, 'Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation is holy, every one of them? Will ye put out the eyes of these men?' You may observe, that these persons, who spoke the very language of our present libertines, could not be convinced, by all the wonders God had wrought for them, that others were more holy than themselves, or had any authority from God to rule over them. Our libertines may find their picture, also, in those Israelites who murmured in the wilderness, and hankered after the flesh-pots of Egypt; who, in spite of miracles, were made unbelievers by their bellies; who placed freedom in the bondage of Egypt, and looked on the service of God as slavery; who preferred their own way of thinking to divine revelation; who thought they should have been happier, had they been allowed to think for themselves, and, as a consequence to that, to be their own directors and choosers. By their own senses and appetites, by their own reasonings, they were induced to prefer a state of slavery and gluttony, to one of self-denial and submission, and to distrust the promises of God, that this latter state should lead them to freedom and happiness. Saul, being made a

king, was lifted up with self-sufficiency, and invaded the priestly office, thinking there was no necessity, that a meaner man should come between God and him. An independent spirit was the sin of Jeroboam, who, rather than suffer his subjects to worship the true God at Jerusalem, which might have brought them again under the dominion of David's posterity, set up his golden calves at Dan and Bethel, and gave the Israelites a religion of their own. Was not this a glorious kind of libertinism or self-sufficiency, which turned away this usurper, and his rebellious people, from the service of the good, the Almighty, and eternal God, to the adoration of a calf? How despicable a creature is man, when blinded by pretensions to independency! In later times the Jews, forsaking the simplicity of that religion God had given them, followed the various and contradictory traditions of their rabbis, by which the commandments of God were explained away, and rendered ineffectual. Those must certainly have been very self-sufficient instructors, who had the boldness to make the word of God speak a language contrary to its own end and intention, because more agreeable to theirs: it was self-sufficiency that dictated all the idolatry of the Gentiles: what a high opinion must they have of themselves, who choose, or make, their own gods! All their philosophy, excepting that of Socrates and Plato, who acknowledged the blindness of human nature, and the necessity of a divine instructor, was evidently derived from the same source: for not one, but those two, founded his morality on any sense of religion, or ever dreamt of an inability in man to render himself perfect and happy.

Temp. This sets the errors of antiquity in a new point of light, at least to me; and, I verily believe, accounts better than any other hypothesis, for the dogmatical industry of those who propagated them. Mere ignorance, which is only the absence of knowledge, can never be the source of wrong opinions; because it forms no opinions: and although, by means of their ignorance, or imperfect lights, men should fall into errors; such errors could never become epidemic, without the assistance of conceit and self-sufficiency.

Shep. Had all men, Jew as well as Gentile, in the times of our Saviour and his apostles, been sensible of their own ig-

norance; would not this, think you, have procured Christianity an easier admission, in every country where it was preached?

Temp. Certainly.

Shep. Men must feel their own wants, before they will either look for, or accept of a supply. A man who thinks himself hale and sound, will laugh at the physician, who pretends to prescribe to him. It was nothing else but self-sufficiency that made our religion appear foolishness to the Greeks, and, indeed, to all who ever, in any age, pretended to a reason for rejecting it: of those who received it, there were not a few disgusted at its simplicity, and confident enough of their own abilities, to imagine they could improve it by alterations or additions of their own. The foremost of these were those heretics, conceitedly stilled, by themselves, Gnostics, although called, by others, Broboritæ, or dirt-men; who, to give themselves the air of an extraordinary wisdom, taught, in an obscure and barbarous jargon, that the souls of men are of the proper substance of the Deity (in which they are but too closely followed by many of our libertine writers); and yet, that such of these souls, as have been polluted by sin, shall hereafter be united to the principle of evil: for they held too principles, a good and a bad, as well as the Manichees. The rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity was only a compliment made to their own reason by the Sabellians, the Photinians, the Samosatenians, the Arians, and, after them, by the Mahometans, who disbelieved that doctrine on no one argument in the world, but because it was not to be accounted for by their all-sufficient understandings.

Temp. I believe you will not undertake to prove, that Popery took its rise from self-sufficiency, inasmuch as reason and common sense are to be extinguished, before a man can be a thorough-paced Papist.

Shep. Yet Popery borrows a great deal from the belief of human sufficiency; for on what else is the doctrine of merits, and supererogation, founded? To what end is such an abundance of human inventions, of ceremonies unknown to the primitive ages, and of pious frauds; if that church allows Christianity, as its author left it, to be sufficient, and does not think herself able to new-model and alter it for the better?

Temp. The Papists, however, say, our reformation opened a wide door to libertinism.

Shep. We confess it. The sunshine of liberty and inquiry never fails to promote the growth of poisonous weeds in one soil, while it raises delicious fruits, and medicinal herbs, in another. The pope no sooner ceased to be the sufficiency of some men, than they set up a sufficiency of their own, and became popes to themselves; hence arose a crop of wilding extravagancies, as monstrous as it was various. It is in vain to think of being particular in such a wood of notional novelties, through which every self-sufficient traveller beats out a singular path of his own. I shall only take notice of the Socinians, who of all men, the Deists only excepted, pay the highest respect to their own understandings. Other reformers made Scripture the rule of reformation; but the Socinians preferred their own reason to that office, and then forced the Scripture to authorize whatever their reason dictated. Having thus advanced their reason above the word of God, no men ever gave a more glaring proof, that human reason is not in all things and infallible guide. They say, in their Racovian catechism, that those are no Christians who do not pay divine honour and worship to Christ; and yet to this question, in what manner ought we to confide in Christ? the answer is, In the same manner as in God himself. Christ, therefore, according to them, is not God himself, and yet is to be adored with divine worship; which, in another place of the same catechism, they say is due to God only. Who, after this, will deny, that the reason of a Socinian, is self-sufficient? The first, who distinguished himself in England as a successful adversary to religion, and a leader in self-sufficiency, was Hobbes: this gentleman made no scruple to speak of the light and law of nature as a chimera; and as little, to mould Christianity to a system of his own, directly repugnant to the nature and end of all religion; for he labours to establish it as a fundamental point, that the subjects of every community ought to conform, in all religious matters, to the commands of the civil magistrate. To this he added a frightful picture of human nature, representing mankind as altogether selfish and savage. From hence, as well as from his dictating a

set of religious and political notions, unknown to the world before him, it appears, that this gentlemen allowed sufficiency to none but himself. His system was attacked from the press and pulpit, in numberless answers; and the clergy, in particular, thought they could never be too opposite to the principles of Hobbes: he was, however, much read, much admired, and followed by all that sort of men who are ever glad to see religion struck at with any kind of weapon, and who, in those days, were furnished with no other, or no better. His system, at length, yielded to an opposite one, set up by bishop Cumberland: this great divine represented human nature in a more amiable light, and spoke of mankind as benevolent beings, governed by a law of nature, clearly pointing out their duty to them, and enforcing the observance of it, not only by pleasing self-approbations on doing good, and by painful self-convictions and remorses upon doing evil; but, also, by a rational sense of religion. This system gained the easier admittance, in that every one, who espoused it, made a high compliment to himself; whereas the abettors of Hobbism could not stand up for it without allowing themselves to be actuated only by base and narrow principles. On this foundation, laid by the bishop, all the moralists, whether divines or others, have, since that, planned their writings; but not without carrying his principles to a much greater length than he did. One, who peruses their books, can hardly help thinking they looked on man as a being who stood in no need of assistance, either to make him an able divine, or a good man. They have told us, that the religion and law of nature are clearly revealed in the breast of every man; are of great, if not of sufficient force; are eternal, indispensable, and bind the Deity himself; nay, more, some of them have not scrupled to say, that man is rather of the same, than of a similar nature with God. These opinions have shewn themselves almost in every pulpit, and produced a set of moralizing sermons, in most of which it seems to have been forgotten that there is still extant a book called the Word of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is laid aside, ever since reason came of age, or, rather, was esteemed eternal, divine, and capable of perfectly comprehending the nature of God; and as that of the satisfaction made for sin

by the death of Christ, it became an antiquated topic, from the time we acquired too much righteousness of our own, to stand in need of our Saviour's merits. The important sanction of our religion are seldom mentioned, never urged; or, if they are, it is not by the names of heaven or hell, which a polite ear is now too delicate, or too sore, to endure; but by those soft and unalarming appellations of 'future rewards and punishments;' which, however, are so far worn out of fashion, or belief, that even they are rarely used. The moral beauty of virtue serves, instead of heaven, for an inducement; and the moral deformity of vice is insisted on, instead of hell, for a dissuasive. The philosopher hath turned the preacher out of the pulpit, and gives us his own (wretched alternative!) instead of the word of God.

Temp. These things do not pass unobserved by the Deists, who triumph in them, and say, the clergy are making advances towards libertinism.

Shep. That is not all: Lord Shaftsbury hath actually built Deism on this system, adopted by the divines; and Tindal argues from little else, but quotations taken from their writings.

Temp. This I observed with surprise, when I read 'Christianity as old as the Creation:' but, pray, does not the author misquote the passages, or pervert their meaning?

Shep. Not often; but he draws unfair consequences from them: and that passage, which stands qualified and restrained by other passages in its author, being singled out, and artfully introduced, in his performance, is easily made to speak the dialect of Deism: however, it must be owned, the great divines he borrows from, although sound in the faith themselves, have given him but too fair an open to attack Christianity through their idea of it.

Temp. It seems not a little odd to me, that our libertine writers should not, in so many books and pamphlets published on their side of the question, have run into divisions and sects among themselves, considering how perfectly at liberty every one of them is, and how strongly prompted by vanity, to strike out what new systems he pleases. Such a uniformity is seldom found, without reason at the bottom.

Shep. Consider, sir, they have hitherto had nothing else to do, but to attack Christianity: as that is uniform, their

arguments against it can hardly be otherwise; for none but opposite and inconsistent principles can be assaulted by inconsistent reasonings. Another cause of their coherence is, their forming clubs, in which the plan of every operation is concerted, and sometimes the whole performance compounded of matter, to which every member pays his shot. Birds and beasts of prey are sometimes observed to flock together, and make up a sort of societies; and, when they do, it is time for tamer animals to look about them.

Temp. The Deists, certainly, have their meetings; but what they do there, I can only guess.

Shep. All they have to give the world, instead of the religion they are labouring to destroy, is the light of nature, from whence they would have us to believe one uniform scheme of religion and duty must result: but this, having been sufficiently tried already, both in learned and illiterate countries, and having produced an infinite swarm of absurdities and inconsistencies only, fathers on its abettors divisions and contradictions, sufficient, I believe, to change your opinion of their uniformity.

Temp. It is very true; I did not think of that.

Shep. Besides, sir, our English libertines do already in their writings, although they have yet had little or no temptation to it, run strangely foul of one another. Shaftsbury's hypothesis destroys that of Hobbes; Mandeville attacks and defeats Shaftsbury; Shaftsbury and Hutcheson place the law of nature in sentiment, Tindal in reason; about which difference Hutcheson and Balguy have already gone together by the ears; and, as far as a victory was possible between men, who were both partly in the right, and partly in the wrong, the latter hath had the advantage. You, if you have read the performances of these authors, cannot but be sensible I have rightly represented their differences.

Temp. I read them with eyes blinded by prejudice; so that, as they appeared to undermine or baffle the religion I wanted to be rid of, I either did not perceive their contradictions, or, when I did, took it for granted, that one of them, at least, must be in the right. I saw no defects in performances that, one way or other, answered my purposes so well: but I now recollect enough to justify your representation.

Shep. And is not the species of philosophy, we have been speaking of, rightly styled the 'self-sufficient scheme?' How wise, how perfect, how independent a being is man, in human speculation! but how weak and purblind, how corrupt, and prone to wickedness, when weighed in the balance of experience! When the necessity of revelation is to be invalidated, man is, by nature, a gloriously enlightened, a well-disposed, a just and benevolent being: yet, when he is to be taught and trained to either religious or social duties, he is, for the most part, found either very stupid, or perverse; and when he is to be dealt with in the way of business, all manner of precautions and securities are found necessary to guard against the effects of his disingenuity. This being, who, by the strength of his unassisted reason, can know so little, and who, by the corrupt disposition of his will, can practice less, stands in no need of God's instructions, nor of stronger motives to the performance of his duty, than what arise from within himself; is, in a word, perfect and self-sufficient. The experiments of five thousand years, all ending in the grossest folly and wickedness, are not enough to convince him, that he can neither be good nor happy, without the divine assistance.

Temp. Through you, Mr. Shepherd, God hath at length opened my eyes; the scales are fallen off; I am, for the first time, made sensible of my own insufficiency, and of the necessity of divine instruction and grace. It is now matter of amazement to me, that self-sufficient principles could ever have been introduced into a thinking mind.

Shep. It is a question with me, whether they ever were.

Temp. Why, was I not a wretched instance of the kind myself?

Shep. Did you not fall under the guardianship of Mr. Dechaine, when you was in your fifteenth year?

Temp. I did.

Shep. Was not Mr. Cunningham, then, employed as your tutor?

Temp. He was. What a loss did I suffer by the death of my dear father!

Shep. Did not your guardian and tutor take some pains to instil into you the principles of libertinism?

Temp. I was no sooner in their power, than they began

to wean me from Christianity, and to blow me up into a high opinion of myself. In order to the first, I was entertained, on all occasions, with jests and flouts at religion, drawn, as I afterward found, from libertine books. We were often merry on almost every historical passage in the Bible, particularly on the creation, the fall of man, the flood, Abraham's offering up his son, the passage of the Red Sea, Sampson's exploit with the jaw-bone of an ass, the adultery of David, the idolatry of Solomon; and, I am shocked when I recollect it, on the birth, and even the death, of our blessed Saviour. We had a thousand sneers about heaven and hell; and, as for the sabbath and the sacraments, they were our standing topics of ridicule. Mr. Cunningham, indeed, seldom jested with such things; but when ever Mr. Dechaine did, my good tutor shewed, by an applauding laugh, that he enjoyed the joke. Our table was every day crowded with young gentlemen, some of them Templers, who were wondrous sprightly upon the subject of religion, and, above all, on the characters of the clergy. The parson of our parish was of infinite use to us: he is a poor creature, without either sense or spirit; fond of a good bit and a bottle, and of a mien that provokes a jest. When we lived in the country, he dined with us almost every day, and seemed to be brought industriously into my view, in order to represent his brethren, and give me a mean idea of them. My servants (for it was at my house we passed the summers) knew my guardian's mind well enough, and made their court by using the poor wretch like a dog. One would give him dirty water when he called for October; another would strike the edge of a dish against his cheek, as he took it off the table; a third would spill a bowl of butter on his gown, and then ask pardon with a sneer. You may be sure these pranks afforded us too much diversion to be discouraged. How careless you are! was the utmost reproof. We went every Sunday to church, and set a most edifying example before the eyes of the congregation; for we whispered and laughed during the time we spent there; and when the parson went into the pulpit, Mr. Dechaine was as constant to one favourite jest, as the preacher was to his initial prayer. Now for a miracle! Balaam's ass is going to open. But when Mr. Cunningham preached, which was very seldom,

we were all decorum and attention. Whether he hath more sermons than livings, I know not; but I never heard more than two from him, the one on the twentieth verse of the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and the other on the fourteenth and fifteenth verses of the second chapter of the same Epistle. From these he drew, as I thought, a refutation of Christianity, in short harangues, consisting of quaint and affected periods, and delivered with a better action than accent; for when he goes into the pulpit, he leaves his own voice and manner of speaking behind him, and surprises his acquaintances with another, wholly unnatural, through which an uncouth monotony, or tune, reigns from the beginning to the end.

Shep. Well; but how did you spend your evenings and leisure-hours?

Temp. When my tutor and I were by ourselves, we read Hobbes, Shaftesbury, Collins, Toland, Tindal, and such books. Some mornings we hunted, and from breakfast to dinner we read newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, plays, and novels.

Shep. And in the evenings?

Temp. We were constant to the spinet and card-table, not excepting on Sundays.

Shep. What means did they make use of to fill you with a high opinion of yourself?

Temp. That was easily done. I had an early and strong propensity to pride; and neither my guardian nor my tutor ever did any thing to humble it. On the contrary, there was no provocative to it in my family, in my fortune, in my understanding or person, that was not greatly magnified and highly seasoned to me by the flattery of my tutor, servants, tenants, and of every body that came near me. On such a foundation laid in me, it was no difficult matter to build the self-sufficient principle, that is, to make me think my own understanding a sufficient guide, and my own will the best rule for my actions. This was done with much art, and by degrees, as my understanding grew strong enough to go along with their reasonings.

Shep. Did the Christian principles, you had formerly been bred up in, give no opposition?

Temp. None at all.

Shep. You surprise me.

Temp. I will tell you how that came to pass. They found me so full of Christianity and Scripture, that it would have been impossible to introduce libertinism into my mind had they shewn it openly to me. For this reason they covered it at first under the appearance of a more sensible sort of Christianity than my own. You know all the libertine writers pretend to be of our religion, and profess only an intention to recommend a truer idea of it than that which is vulgarly entertained. This enabled my tutor to teach me Christianity out of Hobbes, Shaftsbury, Collins, Toland, and Tindal; insomuch, that I assure you I was a libertine, almost a Deist, before I had any notion I had ceased to be a Christian. Never was there such a juggle as was played in my mind, nor so artful an instiller of loose principles as my tutor.

Shep. Had you not something within you that held correspondence with him, and helped to carry on the cheat?

Temp. Ay, that I had, or he could have done little or nothing. I had one or two passions, that stood, as it were, agape for all he said; and, although a strong sense of religion still held them in, yet they were straining on the slip when his precepts halloo'd them to the game. My pride, which I have already taken notice of, soon made religious instructions, conveyed to me through a vilified clergy, despicable in my eyes. I looked upon myself as sharing in the honour, with my libertine authors, of finding out new and singular notions. I now knew something that others did not know, and was even vain of understanding performances, too artfully and too obscurely wrote for every reader to see through. My new opinions made me so high a compliment, in trusting me with myself, and Christianity set me in so scurvy a light, and presented itself to me with an aspect I thought so assuming and severe, that I preferred the former to the latter, with the same turn of mind exactly that I felt, when, on my first acquaintance with you, I compared your blunt freedom with Mr. Cunningham's obsequiousness.

Shep. I did not perceive by your behaviour, that I had disobliged you.

Temp. I was only a little disgusted; and it was not my

good manners (for I had not been accustomed to shew much to a poor clergyman) that hindered me from discovering it; but the spirit and firmness you shewed, awed me at the very first; your anxiety to disengage me from bad principles gained upon my heart; and, soon after, your reasonings set you above my contempt.

Shep. You intimated just now, that you had somewhat else within you, beside your pride, which helped to recommend the libertine principles to you. Pray what was that?

Temp. Pardon me, sir; it is not fit to name before you. Thus much, however, I will hint to you, that I was fond of pleasure, of a particular pleasure, which Christianity would not tolerate, and which my new principles did. A very near relation of Mr. Cunningham's reaped the first-fruits of the education he had given me; which, however, did not disturb our harmony in the least. Thus you see, sir, how I became a libertine.

Shep. And may not another become a libertine by the same or the like methods?

Temp. He may.

Shep. And yet you expressed great surprise a little while ago, that a thinking mind should ever entertain the self-sufficient scheme. It was also matter of astonishment to you, that an angel of light should set up for it in the presence, and in the beatific vision of God. When irreligion and sin are examined by unprejudiced reason, they seem the most amaxing of all miracles; but when we come to consider the nature of a finite and fallible being, we quickly perceive the possibility of his fall; and supposing him once fallen to a certain depth, we may easily imagine him capable of sinking still deeper and deeper, till he loses sight of God, and every thing that is good.

Temp. This is very true; but mine, you may perceive, was a very peculiar case. No man was ever so beset with snares and temptations as I was; and therefore I am still at a loss to account for the propagation of libertinism, what it is that paves so broad a road for it, and how that road can be carried on almost to the very dregs of the people.

Shep. O, Mr. Templeton, do not think that you, of all men, have undergone the most ensnaring trials. Pride, love of pleasure, licentiousness, and false reasoning, extend

from the highest to the very lowest of men. Vice and debauchery follow, foot for foot; and wherever they are found, libertinism is either already with them, or must be procured at any rate. You have given me a lively picture of the springs and progress of libertinism in one and the same mind. Give me leave to shew how it passes from one mind to another in cases very different from yours, till it arrives at public countenance.

MAN being a social creature, and having many wants which he cannot of himself supply, hath recourse to commerce, and the assistance of others for that purpose. He who was bred up under the influence of religion, and who is still a believer, notwithstanding his having fallen into a vicious course of life, must undoubtedly be in great distress for two sorts of commodities; one is a cure for his religion, and the other a sufficient reason, or a proper principle, to be wicked on. As soon as he finds one who can furnish him, he endeavours to settle a correspondence with him, in which both parties may find their accounts. The person he proposes to deal with, being infinitely conceited, is in as great want of flattery and applause, to sooth his uneasy vanity. These two are fitted to one another, like the male and female screw; the one fills up the vacuities and deficiencies of the other. The one imparts a pleasing self-sufficiency, and is paid with a delicious mess of admiration and flattery. Now this delightful commerce can never fail to be carried on, till infidels cease to be conceited, or bad men find a way to reconcile the rigid principles of religion with an atrocious life. A country drenched in luxury and excess always swarms with these two sorts of men, the conceited infidel and the debauched believer, who are so cut out for each other, that they can hardly subsist asunder; for, if you separate them, the one must be destitute of an opiate for his conscience, and the other, of food for his vanity. No remedy can be found for the festering sting of remorse in a mind determined to be wicked, but infidelity; and no one will applaud or flatter an infidel, as such, but he who hath reduced himself to the infernal necessity of being one himself. How can he, who is distinguished from the vulgar in all things else, bear to be of the same religion? No; here

too it is fit he should be majestically singular. If he is to have any religion, it must be an uncommon one, and self-sufficiency best answers that, as well as all his other purposes. How can he, who is racked with violent passions, and stung with keen appetites, such as avarice, ambition, gluttony, drunkenness, and lust, see the country he lives in, crowded with gratifications for them all, and endure to be withheld by faith, which makes not a single promise to his desires; for he hath none that are refined or spiritual? As things go, a scrupulous Christian cannot rise suddenly to wealth and grandeur; neither can he, consistently with the fashion, have a full enjoyment of the fortune he may have been born to; for, as to the present reigning pleasures, on which the fortunes of the wealthy are expended, Christianity protests against the far greater part of them, and licences only such as disuse among the great, notwithstanding the pure and exquisite delight they impart, hath either almost wholly antiquated or degraded to the lower ranks of mankind. Hence arises a loud and almost universal demand for infidelity; wealth, luxury, and refinement, being of little value without it, nay, infidelity being itself the grand article of luxury that spices all the rest, the highest point of refinement, that whets the taste, and exalts it into perfection. libertinism had no considerable footing in England before Cromwell's time, when it was covered, down to the very cloven foot of contradictory absurdities, in the long cloak of cant, hypocrisy, and enthusiasm. During this dark and stormy night of troubled dreams, Hobbes set up a standard for Deism, or rather Atheism; to which, in a little time, resorted all such as were willing to think there was nothing more in religion than hypocrisy or fanaticism. These sort of men in the reign of Charles the Second, which was the reign of luxury and debauchery, taking that to be religion, which had worn such a fool's coat in the preceding times of confusion, made a jest of all religion. The Jesuits, those men of all shapes and colours, who had been extremely active in turning religion into a medley of absurdities, were now equally industrious to ascribe this monstrous produce of their own labour to the Reformation, in order to draw back as many as they could to themselves, and to push those forward into libertinism, who were already too far

gone to be reclaimed, by charging all these absurdities on Christianity itself. Contempt for cant and hypocrisy was artfully turned into contempt for Christianity, by the profane wits, who aimed at a total destruction of religion, and by the Papists, who wished to see us Atheists rather than Protestants. Since the late Revolution it hath been all along a favourite and ruling maxim, to push religious and civil liberty to the utmost. The clergy, having been looked on as the greatest obstacle to both, fell into disrepute with one half of the people, of whom such as set up for politicians, transferred a part of their resentments and jealousies to the religion they preached. All this time trade was extending, money increasing, and articles of luxury, which are no other than incentives to debauchery, flowing in upon us from every quarter of the world. The richer clergy were hated, the poorer despised; and religion, as it passes through their hands, became either odious or despicable to that large class of men, who thirsted for an increase of liberty, in proportion as more restraint grew necessary to curb the career of their vices.

Temp. What a field was here to sow tares in! Never was there so rank a soil for Popery, which makes vice and salvation consistent, nor for libertinism, which gives a man up to himself, to thrive in.

Shep. Accordingly, the propagators of both were far enough from slipping the season. The missionaries of Rome, having found their sophistry an unequal match for the reason of the London divines, and perceiving that no good was to be done by an open appeal to the understandings of a sensible people, began to practise in secret on their various dispositions, in order to draw them backward, and by the wrong end, into Popery.

Temp. And it is said, they found their account in this expedient.

Shep. How could it otherwise choose? There are always vast numbers of people, who retain a high veneration for the name of Christians, and who, nevertheless, are made impatient by their vices of every Christian restraint. To such as these a religion, that brings with it the name of Christianity, and at the same time a cheap market of indulgences and dispensations, must be extremely acceptable. The wis-

dom of above eight hundred years hath been labouring to accommodate Popery to the vices of its professors, yet so as still to retain a show of Christianity. This was a sufficient task for the policy of Rome itself; and had been to this day unaccomplished, but for the jesuitical casuistry.

Temp. What the Jesuits have done to make Christianity convenient, may be seen in the Provincial Letters of Mons. Pascal, by which it appears, that one who hath a Jesuit for his casuist and confessor, hath no need to turn libertine.

Shep. Jesuitism, in Popish countries, where people are forced by arbitrary power to profess a sort of Christianity, serves well enough instead of libertinism. But in a free country, like this, there is no need of having recourse to such shifts. Here it is too slavish to have the conscience under direction. Here every man hath his casuistry within himself, and is his own Jesuit, I mean, is self-sufficient. However, before a man can be self-sufficient, even here, means are to be made use of; and instruction, which must be denied to Christianity, is altogether allowable, because necessary to libertinism.

Temp. It is true; and were it not to avoid a contradiction, I should say, that self-sufficiency stands in extreme need of assistance.

Shep. You did not arrive at it without a tutor; neither could he have made you such a proficient without the help of books.

I WAS going to say, that the libertine writers, with which we are furnished, are of three kinds; but in this I should have made a mistake, for they are only of three degrees: those of the first, furnish hints and principles for self-sufficiency; those of the second, serve as preparatives to it, by so mangling and misrepresenting revelation, that it seems expedient to look into ourselves for some other system; and those of the third, although still preserving some appearance of Christianity, lead the reader into the very porch of Deism, where they leave him, what one would think it impossible for any man to be, a sort of Christian Deist.[a] As to the first, they were penned by a few who had a most

[a] See the Moral Philosopher, title page, and p. 392. Chubb's True Gospel.

sincere attachment to Christianity, and firmly believed all its doctrines, but, however, defended it, or rather refuted its adversaries, on principles foreign to itself, suggested to them merely by their opposition to those on which it was attacked. While these performances drove the present adversary out of the field, it was not perceived that they laid religion open on the opposite side, to other opponents, more to be apprehended; and therefore it was thought they could not be pushed too far. An abstruse treatise, wrote by the learned bishop already mentioned, the great adversary of Hobbes, was the magazine of these principles: from hence the writings of the second class, which may be called the preparatives to Deism, borrowed a plan of morality, deducible, as it was represented, from the light of nature, and independent of revealed religion: to this was added, by some of those who laboured on it, a new model of Christianity, in which the mysteries were half explained away, and the sanctions, being now less necessary upon the discovery of a sufficient moral obligation, were therefore less insisted on. The Socinians, and all the half-libertines, took sanctuary in this system, as more dependent on themselves, and more manageable, than the old Christianity, which could not be easily bent to their conceits. It was natural for men, who deified their own reason, and wished for a licence to indulge their desires, to rid their minds, as far as they could, of a belief in doctrines above their comprehension, or contrary to their affections.

Temp. Be so good, sir, as to furnish me with an instance or two.

Shep. The most remarkable writer of this class was Divisus, who, by his great abilities and regular life, reflected no small reputation on his party. He was both a great mathematician and divine; his discourses, which abounded with moral reasonings, and leaned chiefly on the religion and law of nature, were, as to the matter, drawn mostly from within himself, and rather illustrated, than supported, by quotations from Scripture. His principles, which were Semi-Arian, made him almost a Christian; and his conduct, as to promotion, made him almost an honest man; for although, by subscribing to principles he did not like, and endeavoured to overturn in his writings, he held a considerable benefice;

yet his disapprobation of those principles hindered him from accepting of a higher place in the church, which, it is certain, he might have had. Great learning, and high refinement, were necessary to the forming distinctions, so extremely nice, both for belief and practice. It is hard to say whether his name, or writings, gave the greater countenance to the Semi-Christian party, of which he was at the head. There never was a man who had greater charity, or an opener benevolence, for all who differed from him in opinion: few men ever wrote better for revelation, nor worse for their own detached notions about particular doctrines: from whence it plainly appears, that he was sincerely a Christian, although on a model different from that of his church. Yet his regard for Christianity did not hinder him from soliciting the enlargement of Woolston; but he gave it as his reason for so doing, that Woolston had only taken that liberty which he himself had all his life been contending for. Surely Divisus was mistaken; for the liberty, assumed by Woolston, was not to argue for truth in an open and ingenuous manner, but by low chicane and base artifices, to spit his venom on the miracles of our Saviour.

Temp. I have read Woolston's book upon the miracles, and am sure the gentleman you are speaking of, could never, but by a gross mistake, find the least resemblance between his own and Woolston's liberties.

Shep. What were precisely the Christian principles of Apobles, is hard to say; for he reduces the creed of a Christian to this short proposition, Christ 'was the Messiah;' and thinks it no way incumbent on us to believe any thing concerning the nature of Christ's person, as differing from that of other men. This obscure creed was, in the opinion of Apobles, sufficiently comprehensive to take in all denominations of Christians, and give peace and uniformity to the church. I will readily allow, all sorts of Christians might join in such a confession of their faith; but must insist, they would be still as far from peace and agreement as ever; because, if we believe Christ to be the Messiah, that is, the chosen and anointed messenger of God, we must, in consequence, believe, that whatsoever he, or those who spoke by his Spirit and authority, have revealed to us, is true. Now if he and his apostles have often and strongly incul-

cated the doctrines of the Trinity, of the incarnation, of the satisfaction, of the resurrection, and a future judgment; we cannot believe Christ to be the Messiah, without believing those doctrines not only to be true, but of the greatest importance to us; and therefore they too must make a part of our confession, as well as of our faith, if a confession is to be made at all. From hence it appears, that he who confesses his faith by this gentleman's creed, must be held to the consequential articles, or else his confession passes for nothing, and leaves the door as open to differences as ever.

Temp. But does he not grant, that whatsoever is plainly set forth in the New Testament ought to make a part of our faith?

Shep. He does; but insists, it is only by implication that it ought to do so, and that the Christian liberty exempts us from any obligation to declare for more than the Messiahship of Christ. Great as this gentleman's abilities were, we may take the liberty to say, he depended too much upon them, when he undertook the defence of a principle so subversive of itself, and so productive of a promiscuous communion among persons who may happen to agree in nothing but the bare repetition of a general proposition, understood in quite different senses. To what end should a confession of any principle be made, if nothing particular or determinate can be gathered from that confession? His maintaining that a power to think might be superadded to matter, as matter, was not a stronger instance, either of his fallibility, or self-dependence, than this. The best reasoners may be led into error by too high an opinion of their own abilities; which often puts men upon inventing systems, that raise far greater difficulties than those they are applied to the removal of. As recourse is, at last, to be had to the faculty of reason, in order to fix our assent, not only to articles of knowledge, but of belief; nothing can be more necessary, than to know the extent of reason, without which it is impossible to be acquainted with either its strength or weakness. Now he who is not sensible of the one, becomes immediately self-sufficient; and he who is unacquainted with the other, lies open to every imposer of opinions: by which means it comes to pass, that when this measure of truth is imagined to be either longer or shorter than it is, mistakes must arise from

the application of it. Hence, again, it proceeds, that men of the greatest geniuses are as liable to gross mistakes, as narrow minds, that are not so self-sufficient; and that they are often no less distinguished by the enormity of their opinions, than by the superiority of their talents. As God does not always give 'the race to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;' so, to humble the pride of human wisdom, when it begins to swell, he often leaves it to itself, that, by its falling into the most ridiculous opinions, and monstrous errors, it may become sensible of its own infirmity, and that it may learn to confine its inquiries within modest bounds, to search only for useful knowledge, and to depend on superior assistance for success, even in that. The Montanism of Tertullian, the Manicheism of Bayle, with a thousand instances of the like nature, serve to exemplify what I have been saying.

Temp. These men you place in the second class, namely, of those who furnish preparatives to Deism. Your Divisus and Apobles put me in mind of many others, some of whom are still alive, and active in the same service: but, pray, who are they that constitute your third class?

Shep They are a set of men, of whom it is hard to say what principles of Christianity they retain, or what they aim at by their writings; but it is certain, that their disciples and admirers are absolute libertines. It is true, they affect the name of Christians; but if you enter into close debate with them on the fundamental articles of Christianity, you will find, there is scarcely one of them who will not explain away, or formally renounce, all those articles; and that, even when they are most guarded, they will deny it to be our duty to confess our faith in them, or the business of the church to require any such confession of us. In short, you will perceive, that they are mere nominal Christians, and that their whole body of divinity is reduced to the first question and answer in the catechism. There is but one principle to which they are constant, and on which they erect their standard: it is this; that, let a man's religion be what it will, he must be acceptable in the sight of God, provided he is sincere in it.

Temp. Methinks I see my good tutor filing off into the third rank.

Shep. You will be better able to judge, just now, whether he is to be placed with this sort of men, in comparison of whom, the open Deist is a saint. One illustrious character will decipher all the rest. Phyodexius, who always shewed himself a much sounder politician than divine, rose, step by step, to one of the richest chairs in our church; and, as he ascended, gave all the proofs of his orthodoxy, that the solemn formality of subscriptions, assents, and consents, could possibly draw from any man: notwithstanding this, he laboured hard to prove, that those who do not love our church, ought to be put in a capacity to destroy it, by the demolition of its legal barrier. He daily pronounced the absolutions of our Rubric in the face of the church; yet told the world, through the press, they were no absolutions at all. In the same place he daily repeated our creeds; yet, in several parts of his work, borrowed arguments from the writings of Socinians, which by an artful turn, he so levelled against the doctrines, either contained in, or necessarily resulting from, those creeds, that he who reads his books grows heterodox himself, while he believes the writer to be orthodox. This effect is not more artfully pushed for, in any of his performances, than in his most celebrated book; whereby he insinuates what he would have us take to be the only necessary conditions upon which the favour of God is to be obtained. Herein it is that he dwells on moral conditions only, and, by slight touches, and double expressions, eludes the necessity of faith in the meritorious death of Christ. No kind of book can be a more dangerous snare to a Christian reader, than that which, pretending to set before him all that is necessary for him to know and practise, in order to his salvation, does, nevertheless, slip unobserved over some of the most important points, and fixes the attention solely on the rest. Thus an article of faith, that cannot decently be refuted, may be dropt, and kept out of sight; so that the reader shall have no occasion given him to think of that article at all, much less to consider it as necessary to be believed in. Yet no writer hath spoken more in favour of sincerity, as sufficient to justify him who hath it, let his other principles be what they will. With him it is enough to be sincere in our religious opinions, so that you and I may be, both of us, sound in our tenets, though directly op-

posite, provided we are each of us, really and truly of his own opinion. As no man can help being internally sincere in his own real principles, the sincerity inculcated by Phyodexius must consist in a conformity between our real principles and outward professions. How far his behaviour, as a clergyman, hath been consonant to his one only necessary principle, let the world judge: however, that the edifying example, displayed in his former conduct, might not wear out of the memories of mankind, he continued to stand at the holy altar of God, consecrating and administering the blessed sacrament by the prescript form of our church; while, in the mean time, his books ran into the eager hands of unwary people; telling them, that if they minded either the Scriptures, or our communion-service, they must be convinced, the consecration and preparation, usually required in order to the right receiving of that sacrament, are needless, or rather prejudicial, niceties. This may have been a proof of his sincerity, just as it is a testimony of his zeal for Christianity, that, during these twenty years past, while it was both secretly undermined, and openly assaulted; he hath never once thought fit to employ his great talents in its defence, but hath, in some measure, farthered the designs of its adversaries by performances so judiciously calculated to subvert the principles and piety of Christians, that it is a doubt, whether all the libertine writings in our language have wounded our religion so sensibly, or so far enfeebled the virtue of its professors, as the works of this one divine. Besides, the Deists have made a considerable use of his writings, in their books against Christianity; and yet he hath not so much as attempted to vindicate those writings, as inapplicable to such purposes; but on the contrary, hath rather endeavoured to strike the weapons out of the hands of those who were defending the faith he professed.

Temp. How is so much disingenuity to be accounted for in a man so remarkable for the goodness of his life and conversation, that I question whether there ever was a clergyman in our church who left a more amiable character behind him in the several places where he exercised his ministry?

Shep. It often happens, that men who are good in all other respects, have one particular failing, one lean insatia-

ble desire, that seems to swallow up all their other passions, and runs them into excesses, sufficient to level them with the rest of mankind. If such was the case of Phyodexius, ambition must have been his darling passion, It is not easily conceived by the unaspiring, how far some men may be transported by the desire of distinguishing themselves, not only in their own, but to all succeeding times; nor do you seem to consider, that exploits, which are far from truly deserving applause, may be successfully employed for this purpose. Those very men, who spread slaughter and devastation through a people, are often thereby rendered popular, and raised to the supreme power; in a more pacific character, the display of great talents, exerted for the overthrow of old opinions, and the advancement of new, shall set a man on the highest pinnacle of fame that character admits of; while, in the mean time, the truth of those opinions is compared, and the arts, made use of to turn the scale in favour of the latter, are considered, by few.

Temp But when one, highly distinguished for his virtues, labours to change the sentiments of mankind in relation to religious matters, do not reason and charity require that we should attribute his industry to a zeal for truth, and a desire of doing good?

Shep. They do, provided the means he makes use of are open, honest, and ingenuous; but, if they deserve the contrary epithets, how can a zeal for truth be at the bottom? If the means are evil, how can the end and intention be good?

Temp. Perhaps the good intended cannot be effected by better means.

Shep. Then it is never to be attempted, because we are forbid, expressly, 'to do evil, that good may come of it.' The service of an infinitely wise, good, and powerful Being, deigns not to receive assistance from chicane and double-dealing, which are neither consistent with it, nor wanted by it. If 'the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God,' much less can his dissimulation do it.

Temp. Does not Christ lay it down for a rule, that the quality of a man's principles are to be judged of by the fruits or effects of those principles in his life and conversation?

And how, then, can a man's principles be bad, if his actions are good?

Shep. This criterion of principles, proposed by our Saviour for the use of those who might not have penetration enough to see into the real tendency of the principles themselves, is by no means what you take it to be. His words are these; 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits; do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?' Here it is plainly intimated, that these false prophets, or teachers, appear to be good men; for 'they come in sheep's clothing;' and therefore the fruits, by which the quality of their doctrines is to be found out, are the tendency and effects of those doctrines upon those who embrace them. Before the badness of a doctrine can be discovered by the vices of him who preaches it, the sheep's clothing must be laid aside, and his ill life made manifest. Till this happens, if speculative reasonings cannot unmask the doctrine, an experiment of its effects on ourselves, or others, affords the only means of judging whether it ought to be acquiesced in, or not. This mark, or rule, to censure doctrines by, is, however, as I have already observed, given only for the use of such as are not perfectly acquainted with the truths of religion. But all men, already instructed by 'the oracles of God,' are commanded 'to search the Scriptures,' and 'to try the spirits' of such as pretend to teach: nay, St. Paul is so far from allowing the virtue of a teacher to vouch for the rectitude of his documents, that he lays a bar against depending on the purity even of an angel, for such a purpose. But if the sins of the teacher himself are sufficient to bring suspicion on his instructions, why should we open our ears and hearts to him who introduces what he would inculcate with artifice and disingenuity? Or is artifice, which we detest in others, no sin in a teacher of religion? This way of using art, in matters of religion, to which it is, of all things, most repugnant, hath been, for some time, extremely in vogue among us, and hath been attended with a remarkable decay of piety and common honesty, as is but too sensibly felt by every man in his private dealings, and by the community, in a want of public spirit, and fidelity to our country.

Temp. Whence does it proceed, that loose principles of religion, without any thing else to introduce them but arts so glaringly disingenuous, should ever make a progress among mankind?

Shep. Bad principles, recommended by as bad arts, must have perished in the very birth, had there not been numbers amongst us, to whom loose principles are ever as acceptable, as the licence they bring along with them. With such it can be no objection to the writer they stand in need of, that he uses as much art as is necessary to their purposes; that he does not alarm them by setting out with a declaration against religion; but, making a show, at first, of much the same sentiments of Christianity with their own, seems, by the same imperceptible steps, at once to write himself, and his readers, out of all disquietudes about religion. These performances, thus artfully managed, are also admirably fitted to insnare the candid inquirer after truth, who hath no intention to desert his religion; but, having more curiosity than judgment, and being willing to read on all sides of the controversy, is never so likely to make shipwreck of his faith, as when he strikes on a work of this kind. Now the present age is so plentifully stocked with libertine books, and their contents are so often made the subject of discourse, that a man hath no business to set up for reading, or for learned conversation, without a competent knowledge of them. A reader of moderate talents, not knowing the extent of his understanding, and taking it to be much greater than it is, thinks himself a match for any writer. Upon the strength of this conceit, he launches, without fear, into a controversy he is by no means equal to; the result of which is, that a medley of undigested notions, crowding into his head, fill it with a perfect chaos of inconsistencies: this confusion naturally produces doubts; and they, for the most part, lead to infidelity. Such is the effect in a weak mind, after having read the True Gospel of Chubb, the Moral Philosopher of Morgan, and the like performances.

Temp. I know two or three young gentlemen, who read even the Characteristics, the Independent Whig, the Grounds and Reasons of Christianity; subscribe to all they find in those books; and, nevertheless, actually take themselves to be Christians.

Shep. This frequently happens, and proceeds from their not knowing what Christianity is, nor rightly understanding what the writers drive at in those performances; yet the readers you speak of, are so well satisfied with themselves, that they will hardly allow their admired authors a greater share of sense. If I mistake not, I have seen some of these your acquaintances in the pulpit, edifying their hearers, not with a discourse founded on the Scriptures, nor stolen from Tillotson, but with a fine philosophical essay about moral beauty, and the internal senses, wire-drawn from the writings of Mr. Hutcheson, who only refines on those of Lord Shaftsbury.

Temp. I cannot see what a preacher can propose to himself by trifling on such topics.

Shep. A discourse of this kind shews, that he who delivers it is not one of your ordinary divines; and, besides, contributes not a little to the repose of all that hear it; whereas a too spiritual performance seems tritical, and may excite an uneasy ruffle in the consciences of the audience, already inclined to doze over their sins. Conceit in the preacher, and a mistaken delicacy in the hearer, produce all these unscriptural sermons.

Temp. It is not, indeed, to be wondered at, that men so self-conceited, should draw but little from the Scriptures, which present us with a mortifying picture of our own insufficiency and vileness. It is, I verily believe, for this, among other reasons, that they deal by the sacred writings, at present so much neglected, as the old woman did by the mirror, which she found in a dunghill: after wondering how so beautiful a thing should be placed in so contemptible a situation, it no sooner presented her with a glimpse of her own loathsome countenance, than she threw it where she found it, and said, 'You are deservedly cast out into that filthy place by all people, for impudently misrepresenting them to themselves.'

Shep. Your apologue is too just and plain to need a comment. If advice, of any kind, is to be given, it must be so managed, as neither to call the conduct of the giver in question, nor to disturb the consciences of those, to whom it is directed. An adviser must have a care of pushing with a weapon that hath a point at either end. Our very fashion-

able teachers are aware of this, and therefore make but little use of the Scriptures, as well out of tenderness to themselves, as because they find little therein, but such things as, if digested into their discourses, would disgust or shock a polite ear. These physicians suit their medicines to the palates, not the distempers, of their patients; and are even so unfaithful, as to give laudanum for a lethargy. If they do vouchsafe to draw any thing from the Scriptures, they pick out such expressions as seem to countenance their novelties, when torn from the context, or wrest others to their own fancies; out of their abundance of self-sufficiency they make doctrines, instead of delivering messages: full of themselves, they presume to prompt the Holy Ghost, and shew the force of their talents in dissipating the vulgar errors of theology, in correcting antiquity, and striking out new lights, unknown to former ages. Hence it is, that their discourses, which often pervert the judgment, without ever touching or mending the heart, please only those who relish a novel better than the Bible. A preacher, who in handling a practical subject, does not make it his chief endeavour to turn the attention of his audience on the continual inspection of Almighty God, and on a future judgment, does but beat the air; and as he speaks without spirit and power, so he speaks without effect. He who is studious of entertaining, rather than reforming his hearers, accommodates his discourse only to the genteeler part of his audience, few of whom can bear, with patience, the awful doctrines of our religion. He knows, that 'from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in them, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores;' wherefore he either touches them not at all, or, if he does, it is with something softer than velvet: instead of a sermon, he gives them a curt harangue, made up of pretty little thoughts, tricked out in spruce phrases, that light on the audience, like snow, so cool and gentle, that they are but just perceived. Although the ears of those he speaks to are shut against the voice of religion by the foul ulcer of luxury, pride, and self-sufficiency, and therefore ought to be lanced with thunder; yet he only tickles them with novelties and heresies, and soothes them with stupifying or poisonous palliatives. While the spirit of Christianity is often thus banished from the pulpit, that

of libertinism hath a free course through the press, and assumes a boldness in conversation and coffee-house harangues, which is scarcely indulged to Christianity. From this view of the times, I believe, sir, you will agree, that the road down to Deism is made sufficiently broad and smooth.

Temp. Yes; but I think your two last classes, instead of preparing the way to it, have conducted their disciples thither already, and have left nothing for a professor of Deism to do.

Shep. O, sir, a great deal: such betrayers of religion only serve as step-stones, upon which the weaker and more squeamish sort of libertines go over to Deism; there being few, who have in themselves a sufficient stretch of genius to cross the wide gulf between religion and infidelity at one stride, or strength enough to reach the farther bank at one leap. Those who help them over, do but land them in the shallow water and mud of infidelity, where the thorough-paced Deist is ready to lend them his shoulders. It is the business of a master-workman to finish these infidels, who are, as yet, but blocked out to their hands. The new proficients in self-sufficiency still look on themselves only as a sort of libertine Christians.

Temp. Among the several performances that inculcate deistical, under the mask of Christian principles, don't you comprehend the late famous introductory discourse, &c. relating to miracles? The Deists triumph in that, and some other writings of the same author. I should be surprised to hear the clergy were as well satisfied with them.

Shep. We have already considered the clergy as not all equally remote from Deism; besides, the book you inquire about, notwithstanding the use it is of to the Deists, may have proceeded from a real love of truth in the author, spiced, however, with a self-sufficient ostentation of uncommon sagacity and learning. It is, undoubtedly, of some service to any truth, to prune away from it all the excrescences that usually shoot out of it, while it is lodged in minds irregularly prolific; because such never fail to give it a grotesque appearance in the eye of better reason. False arguments, also, hurt a good cause, when, by long and frequent use, they seem to grow to it, and incorporate with it. Had the author ever signalized his abilities, which I never

heard that he did, in the defence of our common Christianity, against the continual assaults of its adversaries; such performances, as his last, might very well admit of a favourable interpretation. But, having, instead of this, endeavoured to beat down some arguments, usually brought for its support, which, nevertheless, keep their ground in the estimation of the judicious, having condemned, without distinction, the miracles said to have been wrought in the early ages succeeding that of the apostles; and having, in many places, condemned them, for reasons almost equally affecting those of our Saviour and his immediate disciples; his book is deservedly suspected of a deistical tendency. His charging so many of the fathers, without sparing even the martyrs, with wilful lies and forgeries, would have come better from the pen of a Tindal, or any other malicious libertine, than from that of a clergyman. To one who considers him as a Christian, his book can do little harm; and ought to do still less, wherever he is believed to be a Deist; because, in that case, the solemn subscriptions and declarations, with which he hath imposed on the church, and the ecclesiastical emoluments he enjoys by his prevarication, being considered at the same time with his principles, must, to every thinking mind, be a sufficient preservative against the infection of his books. With what face can a deistical doctor of divinity object a want of truth or sincerity to the fathers, or to any man? What honest man will care to hear or read him, after his principles and designs are discovered? Or what man, of less art and learning, if he is not an idiot, will take any thing off his hands, without a clear irresistible demonstration?

Temp. Every one is ready to catch at the least appearance of an argument in favour of such principles as his heart hath espoused, before his head is thoroughly convinced of their truth: such books as this, wrote by the seeming friends of Christianity, contribute more to mend the pace of a willing reader in his progress towards Deism, than the works of a professed Deist.

Shep. Few will read them for any other purpose, be the intentions of those who write them ever so good: however, performances of that kind are but helps to infidelity. Their admirers, if they have not something else to depend on, or

were not Deists before they read them, are still but imperfect libertines. They have, indeed, fairly broken the chain of religion; but, however, still drag some links of it at their feet, which make them halt ungracefully, as it were, 'between two opinions,' and which none but the true Deist can knock off. The libertine beast hath burst his fetters, but is still within the fences, which must be broken down, before he can range at large. A clergyman, or one who professes himself a Christian, cannot handsomely do this for him; and therefore another, who can undertake it, and yet not act out of character, must be called to his assistance. If it so happens, that one who is prepared to enter on the last stage of self-sufficiency, hath never a Deist among his acquaintances to lend him a helping hand; he can, however, be at no loss, since there is a variety of books, so well penned for his purpose, and so judiciously adapted to the humour and capacity of every candidate for Deism, that, if he makes a proper choice, a few hours reading will be sufficient to finish what is wanting to one, already so far advanced, and so very tractable. In one he will see Christianity attacked through its ordinances; in another, through its mysteries; in another, through its miracles; and in another, through its ministers. This will draw him along with a regular chain of reasoning; that will lead him through a choice collection of miscellaneous quotations; and a third will entertain him with wit and humour, sufficient to put a thousand demonstrations out of countenance. But as a system, of some sort or other, may be necessary to settle his thoughts, and to insure his principles, the infallibility of reason, the moral sense, the mortality of the soul, and God's indifference to all our actions, with many others, will offer themselves to his option.

Temp. Although the Deists reject no hypothesis that can be turned to their own advantage, or to the discredit of Christianity; yet every one singles out a favourite system, to which he is directed more by humour than judgment, and in which he rests satisfied, till the growth of his desires and passions calls for a scheme of laxer principles. It is just so, some naturalists tell us, that the cray-fishes, at a certain season, fit themselves with shells, which had been formerly cast off. Their choice is perfectly libertine; for

they single out such as they think of a proper size for their purpose, and crawl into them backward, repeating the experiment, till they find themselves easy in some one or other of the heap.

Shep. Was it in that manner you entered into libertinism?

Temp. It was even so, wrong end foremost; and my head was the last part of me that went in. There is nothing in the world I am more thoroughly convinced of, than that there is not one libertine among a thousand who is not turned away from religion by his vices; and therefore I think that infinite conceit, which distinguishes them from the rest of mankind, altogether unaccountable. I assure you, sir, my own, notwithstanding the great degree of pride to which I am by nature addicted, astonished me, as often as I recollected the shameful passions that gave birth to my libertine turn of mind.

Shep. Your surprise, that the libertine should be the most conceited of all men, proceeds from your beginning to think at the wrong end of the business, and considering that as the effect, which is really the cause. A Deist is not conceited, because he is a Deist; but a Deist, because he is conceited. It is somewhat originally within the man, that predisposes him to peculiar opinions. Surely it must have been some previous disposition, rather than reason, that made St. Evremont a libertine, and Pascal a bigot,[a] in the same country, and with an eye to the same religion. You know, sir, that vanity, as well as lust or avarice, is a vice, which the self-sufficiency of libertinism is extremely well fitted to gratify.

Temp. You account exceedingly well for that which puzzled me so much.

Shep. Christianity is farther from tolerating pride, than any other passion; whereas pride and libertinism mutually encourage and feed each other. The proud man will not be restrained, and the unrestrained grows yet prouder than he was before, when he compares his liberty with the bonds of others. This will appear to any man of sense, who peruses the deistical performances, without a bias, either for, or

[a] Pascal declares, somewhere in his Provincial Letters, that, in his opinion, no man can be saved, who does not die in communion with the church of Rome.

against, their principles. Although (Cornelius Agrippa only excepted) there never was a libertine who was also a conjurer, or set up for more wisdom than his own; yet they all pretend to such a full sufficiency of that, as no other sort of men can equal, nor any other being add to.

THE self-sufficiency or Deism of lord Herbert, led the attack made on Christianity in England; and therefore the credit of singularity, and the glory of treading the yet unbeaten path, is entirely due to him. Our later Deists, who affect the same, have no sort of right to it. They do but follow and imitate. If no one had ventured before them, they would perhaps have been bigots, and some of them Papists, as long as they lived. This writer endeavoured to prove that every man hath an innate idea of God, and his duty so moulded up in the very original make and the constitution of his mind, as never to be defaced or obliterated; or, in other words, that every man is born an able divine and moralist. We have already had occasion to examine the merits of this opinion, which Mr. Locke hath refuted to the satisfaction of every one who reads him. His lordship having laid down innate practical propositions, as the basis of his theology, found himself obliged to write an elaborate apology for Paganism; an undertaking of so much difficulty, that it could never have been even thought of, but by one who adored his own, and despised his reader's understanding. Some of the Pagan extravagancies he endeavours to palliate by explaining them into allegories and symbols. The rest, which were a little too gross to be refined in his figurative alembic, he charges to the account of priestcraft, and, in my opinion, very justly. But most assuredly no craft nor cunning could ever have established almost throughout the whole world, such enormities both in principle and practice, had the mind of every man been enlightened with a right indelible idea of God, and his will, impressed on the original frame of human nature, and essential to the soul of man.

Temp. This I am now fully convinced of.

Shep. You may observe, sir, that, as the Christian religion was introduced into the world by men in the lowest rank of life, its great adversary, Deism, owes its origin, at least among us, to a man of quality. The contempt which poverty

and ignorance always draw upon themselves, fell through the apostles upon the religion they preached; whereas the honour and admiration, with which high birth and titles are revered, were derived upon Deism through the dignity of its author; and, what was likely to contribute more to its growth, than a thousand titles and estates, it had the advantage of his lordship's great talents of learning, eloquence, and address, which were above his honours and fortune. Yet Christianity, notwithstanding its humble genius and contemptible appearance, went faster up among mankind, and against the stream, than Deism, with all its pomp and borrowed aids, went downward, although on a full tide of passion and corruption; for the sufficiency of God is infinitely more powerful than the self-sufficiency of man.

Temp. This, I think, is a very strong and obvious argument for the former.

Shep. There never lived a man before him, and but one after him, who was more self-sufficient than Mr. Hobbes. The dictator appears in his whole system, which hath the honour to be opposite to all the sentiments of all the philosophers, legislators, and divines, that ever lived; and in the air of every paragraph; the style and manner throughout being dogmatical and peremptory. Conceited people always affect singularity; and conceited writers, singularity of opinion and style. Of all authors, Hobbes is one of the most singular, as well in his manner, as his matter. His definition of reason, although formerly cited, is so pregnant an instance of this, that I cannot forbear repeating it. 'Reason,' says he, 'when we reckon it among the faculties of the mind, is nothing but reckoning (that is, adding and subtracting) of the consequences of general names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying our thoughts.'

Temp. Are you sure those are the words of the author?

Shep. The very words.

Temp. Well, it is indeed the strangest definition! and seems rather to intimate somewhat in arithmetic, than the thing it is put for. As I understand nothing of algebra, but that letters are used to mark certain supposed numbers, and as those numbers are signified by words, I fancy it is taken from thence.

Shep. Observe, he calls it a definition of the faculty of

reason, whereas he says it is reckoning, which you know is an act. As far as it hath any sense in it, or is intelligible, so far it is false and absurd. He says in the same chapter, 'The light of human minds is words, but by exact definitions first snuffed and purged from ambiguity.'

Temp. This is very diverting. Reason, then, which is the light of human minds, is but a word; and, when trimmed by the snuffers of his definition, is put out.

Shep. His definition of religion is singularly curious. 'Religion is fear of power invisible, feigned by the mind, or imagined from tales publicly allowed.' These short sketches, sir, may serve for a taste of his singularity and conceit.

Temp. They are not very consistent with the high character of his understanding among the enemies of religion.

Shep. He was certainly a man of prodigious abilities, but eat up with vanity, and a desire to distinguish himself above the rest of the world by uncommon and surprising performances. His contempt for mankind prevented his being much acquainted either with them, or their works. It was by the fire-side, and from within himself, that he drew the plan by which he proposed to new-model religion and politics. He must, no doubt, have made a most glorious figure among writers, had his vanity suffered him to employ his genius in the support of a possible system. But as he set himself to invent and defend one altogether chimerical, he appears weak and destitute of the great abilities he was actually cursed with, as a giant does, who attempts to heave a weight too great for his strength. His moral behaviour is free from blame, excepting in one instance of great disingenuity. He wrote his Leviathan to serve the cause of Charles the First; but, having fled with others who followed the prince into France, he grew tired of his banishment, and, turning his performance to the service of the opposite cause, made a merit of it with the usurpers, in order to his safe return to England; nor did he stick to give this as his reason to lord Clarendon before he left France.

Temp. When I read his book, I thought it calculated rather to be a prop to the arbitrary power pretended to by some kings, than an encouragement to the insurrections of subjects.

Shep. It is so; but, before it was published, Cromwell had made himself master of more than the regal power; and so it served his purpose as well as if it had been originally wrote at his request.

Temp. Notwithstanding this vile instance of his disingenuity, no writer of that kind ever had so many disciples and admirers; which proves to demonstration the truth of what I have heard you sometimes observe, that there are numbers who wish to be deceived, and with whom it actually recommends a libertine writer to shew that he is a trickster.

Shep. We have had a few rakes among us, such as lord Rochester, lord Wharton, and Mr. Dryden; of whom the first mistook his vices for libertine principles; and the two last were so far of no religion, that they were ready to be of any. As they do not immediately relate to our subject, I shall take but a cursory notice of them. When the witty lord Rochester sat down to burlesque the Scriptures, he looked on himself as a libertine in theory as well as in practice; but he was mistaken; his vices had only amused, not convinced his reason; for the approach of death dissipated all the sophistry of his passions, and he found himself again a Christian.

Temp. This was natural. Opinions, espoused without reason, may be easily refuted without reason; and those principles, which youth, health, and gaiety, impose upon high spirits, for want of a solid foundation, give way to age, sickness, or fear.

Shep. Although a libertine, for his own credit, and that of his book, may keep up a face of courage and cheerfulness at the last, so many of them have been converted to Christianity by the near prospect of death, that great humbler of self-sufficiency, that I fancy those who died the hardest, and with all the outward eclat of libertinism, were nevertheless inwardly frighted, and miserably distressed, to keep up the farcical grin in the last act of the tragedy. Lord Rochester's and Mr. Dryden's character represent to us a large class of men, who are led by their passions and debaucheries to make a jest of religion, without knowing all the time, whether they themselves have any religion or not, and without considering whether religion ought to be retained or rejected.

They are, however, more ingenuous than the systematical libertine, and can with a better grace tack about at the last, and put into port, as Mr. Dryden did into Popery, the shortest cut, and the most convenient for him, who strikes over from libertinism to religion in the close of the evening. Lord Wharton afterward imitated him in this, but not without a French pension; for he thought fit to have something in hand. Blount was not satisfied with dictating like a philosopher, but gave responses, like Apollo. This Delphic gentleman published the oracles of reason, in which he and his friends inform us, that pleasure is the chief good; that God and the human soul are material; that the latter is mortal; that the world is eternal; that all things are governed by a kind of fate or necessity, with other the like extraordinary discoveries, which mankind were not well aware of before. Although this writer gives the name of oracles to the scattered papers, of which his book consists, yet he does not deal so much in ambiguities as the other Deists; but exhibits to the world, in very intelligible terms, a deistical confession of faith, which might have served for the basis of all disputes between them and us, had not the other Deists made some essential alterations in their system. This gentleman, however, is more to be commended than all the rest of the fraternity, inasmuch as he alone acts an open and ingenuous part. But, poor man! after having refuted the Christian revelation by his own, he at length unfortunately brought that into some discredit too; for, his oracle prompting him to solicit his sister-in-law to marry him, and her oracle forbidding the banns, he shot himself.

Temp. The world, I suppose, was unworthy of this superior being; and so he left it in a huff to return to his brethren the *Dii majorum Gentium.*

Shep. I HAVE spoken of the former deistical writers but briefly, because they are little concerned in the present controversy with Christianity. I shall not, I hope, be tedious to you, if I dwell a little longer on some that are to follow.

Temp. By no means, sir; I shall listen with the greatest pleasure.

Shep. You know the writer of the Characteristics, as a controvertist, is much echoed by all the libertines; and, as

a writer of taste and entertainment, admired almost to adoration.

Temp. In the latter capacity I cannot help still looking on him as a most polite and pleasing author.

Shep. Perhaps it is my prejudice to his principles, that hinders me from regarding him in the same light. I am, I confess it, a very plain and blunt sort of a man. If, however, I observe as great a decorum in censuring even the politeness of a lord, as his lordship does in speaking of those he does not care for, I hope you will not expect more from a poor, clumsy, country parson.

Temp. Were he to hear you himself, he could expect no more.

Shep. Were he to hear me with the same patience I read him, he would have no pretence to blame me for running backward and forward from point to point, like himself; especially as the confusion of his performances must unavoidably transfuse itself into every thing that can be said of him. This writer is full of encomiums on the beauty of universal benevolence, on the love of mankind, or of the species, and on the social virtues. He is all rapture, when he thinks of them. As he was particularly fond of painting, he hath, at the beginning of his works, given us that graceful figure, by which he would have the world form its idea of his face and person; and throughout all his writings he hath done little else, than present us with that beautiful portrait, by which he would recommend his mind to our admiration. But as he cannot conceal his industry for this purpose, so neither can an intelligent reader avoid observing, that all his refinement, all his delicacy, and all his parade about benevolence, flow entirely from vanity and affectation. His self-sufficiency discovers itself, in spite of all his disguises, in a supercilious, dictating, declamatory manner, in a settled contempt for all who differ from him, and in a want of decent acknowledgments to Cumberland and others, from whom he poorly steals the gaudy feathers he flutters in. He would have his readers believe, that he first introduced into philosophy the notions of moral beauty and deformity; for which, notwithstanding, he is beholding to Cumberland, and he again to Plato, Cicero, and other ancient philosophers, who had nothing oftener in their mouths, than the τὸ καλὸν κἀγαθὸν,

the τὸ πρέπον, or *honestum*. He loves all mankind, and yet he praises himself, and becomes immeasurably satirical when he flouts at the clergy, which he does twice at least, for once that his subject naturally admits of it. He dwells long on this good-natured topic, and takes in the whole order, without one exception, in his comprehensive encomiums. He is also excessively polite and delicate in the similitudes and other sentiments he employs for that purpose. A polemical controversy is a match at foot-ball, and the disputants are kickers and boxers; blows, outcries, foot, fist, adorn this description;[a] which, after all, is really the highest piece of humour throughout the writings of his lordship. Were we to pursue his elegant allegory, we might say, his lordship kicks the controversial ball with a becoming fury, with a mien sufficiently rude. He elbows all about him, and drives the dirt up abundantly in his adversaries' faces; and at length turns the play, which was not very delicate before, into a boisterous boxing-match. The Deists, who look on (to speak in his own sublimity of style) well-pleased to see the too cool and civil exercise changed to an entertainment more interesting, and likely to end in a more important defeat of the adversary, encourage their favourite champion with social shouts and huzzas, directing his hostile fist to the tender temple, or the unguarded stomach of his antagonist. He, not forgetful of a long-practised art, entangles the arms of the adverse caitiff in his coat, and then, with a matchless adroitness, rekicking him on the yielding ham, flings him into the dirt; where having laid him, he beats time on his nose and eyes to the harmonious acclamations of the encircling mob. In his fifth miscellany he is wholly taken up in commenting on his own works, particularly his Rhapsody, which he is far from vilifying. He allows little judgment or refinement to any of the English writers, excepting two or three lords, Buckingham, Roscommon, &c. and almost the latter half of that long chapter is laid out on shewing how well he himself, and how ill the clergy, who write for Christianity, succeed, especially in dialogue. He takes abundance of pains to represent the clergy as a formal, clumsy sort of people; and they may be so, for aught I can

[a] See the Characteristics, vol. iii. p. 15.

tell, who am so unpolished myself. However, if you will promise not to laugh at me, I will give you my idea of good breeding; and afterward, if you should chance to think it not altogether amiss, examine his lordship's behaviour, as a writer, by it.

Temp. I have seen enough of the world already, to make me sensible ill-nature and spleen can never consist with good manners.

Shep. Good-breeding, in my opinion, should have for its basis piety and virtue. It is true a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet a clown; but, clown as he is, he will injure no man, and, considering himself as always in the presence of God, he will so act, as not to offend him, to whom his highest respect is due; he will, to the uttermost of his power, behave himself according to the relation he stands in to God, as well as man.

Temp. It is certain a thorough good behaviour ought to be regulated, chiefly in respect to the greatest person or being present. If a gentleman at the king's levee should carry it with ever so much decorum to others, this could not excuse his seeming regardless of the royal presence.

Shep. Nor would the ceremony of the place permit him to carry on a private quarrel with any other person in the chamber, at least in a language loud enough to be heard by his majesty.

Temp. No, that would be an insult on the king himself.

Shep. A person thus awed by a sense of religion, will seldom or never suffer his passions to run out into wild or shocking excesses; by which he will reap this great advantage over other less manageable tempers, that while they frequently become intemperate or outrageous, or at least are observed to hold in their passions at the full stretch of the bridle, he keeps his seat with an unconstrained and graceful air, and wants infinitely less to make him a perfectly well-bred man, than he who hath nothing more than the mere exteriors of behaviour. A person thus qualified, with a moderate share of natural understanding, and of intercourse among men of polite education, will soon acquire a competency of that accomplishment and address, which are expected from persons of his rank. If to this an unaffected

humility, which, in my opinion, nothing can so well teach him, as religion, be added, he can hardly fail to be very agreeable.

Temp. I wish I could as fully reduce to practice your idea of good breeding, as I can approve of it. But wherein hath the writer we are speaking of, acted inconsistently with this idea?

Shep. He every where professes himself a Christian; and yet, on many occasions, talks of God, of Christ, of the Scriptures, and of the religion he declares for, not only in a strain of burlesque and ridicule, but with an air of open contempt, as may be seen in his second miscellany, where he is as free with Almighty God as with the prophet Jonah. If good breeding can be founded on profaneness, his lordship was indeed perfectly well-bred. But if a man, to be well-bred, must be virtuous; and if an open and honest sincerity is one of those virtues that have the nearest relation to true good-breeding; then his lordship can have no better title to the latter than to the former; and what that is, will easily appear, if you consider, that although he talks finely of virtues and vices, particularly in his inquiry concerning virtue, yet he says nothing of dissimulation there; and elsewhere gives reasons why himself and others, who write like him about religion, are obliged to make use of it. He makes the whole of duty to arise from natural affection and aversion, and describes with abhorrence the object of the one, and with rapture that of the other; yet not only approves of, but practises, a base and disingenuous method of infusing his own opinions into the minds of his readers. Is there no deformity in such a practice? Is there no beauty in open and honest dealing by the understanding of others? Does reason, truly such, ever recommend any thing to us, the tendency whereof she is not at liberty to lay open, in order that the mind, to be instructed, may infer the truth, from the real utility of her dictates? Surely it is a most preposterous way, that of blindfolding a man in order to lead him to truth. Reason, right reason, hath no need to deceive. Can there be rational, any more than pious, frauds? What priest, either Roman or Egyptian, ever used more fraud than he and his brethren, when they look our Saviour in the face, call him theirs, speak sometimes honourably of him, to

avoid alarming his worshippers, and in the mean time labour slyly to prove him an impostor? Was not Judas and his kiss a type of these persons, and their practices?

Temp. I must confess I think such practices highly disingenuous.

Shep. And is not that which is highly disingenuous, very unbecoming a gentleman, or a man of true good-breeding?

Temp. No doubt it is; and, if made use of in religious matters, impious too.

Shep. I was going to say so. As to his good humour, complaisance, and condescension, if barely recommending those amiable essentials of good-breeding to others may denominate him well-bred, I must own he is highly so; but whether there ever were three volumes published, in which more arrogance in dictating, or more spleen and contempt in censuring, are demonstrated, than in his, and more to the life, I know not; they never came to my hands. It is a mark of ill-breeding to talk to ourselves when others are present, because it shews we think highly of ourselves, and contemptibly of them. He also is esteemed ill-bred, who entertains his company with many or long discourses of himself. It is just so, however, his lordship serves his readers. He talks of himself, and to himself, on all occasions, and swells intolerably when he does so. He lectures like a lord indeed, and dictates with the disdain of one who is self-sufficient and perfectly assured. To prefer others to one's self is that engaging article of good manners, by which, with little or no other help, some people acquire the name of fine gentlemen. But on the contrary, to prefer one's self to others, especially in point of understanding, is one of the grossest insults, and generally the most fiercely resented, of all the affronts that pride and arrogance can offer. Now his lordship in this respect, as the inventor of a new system, as a man of refined taste, as a superior critic, as skilled in painting, sculpture, music, &c. runs out into shameless excesses, and sets himself above mankind. His vast parade of knowledge in these matters, is for the most part wholly foreign to the subjects he handles, and favours strongly of conceit and pedantry. The enormous liberty he takes in impertinently digressing every now and then from the point under consi-

deration, is nothing better than trifling with his reader. People of real good-breeding and discretion never wander far from the scope and drift of their discourse, when they are speaking to persons for whom they have any respect; much less do they, like this author, every moment give a loose to the extravagant sallies of imagination, impertinently burlesquing the lowest thoughts with an affected pomp of expression, in the midst of a philosophical disquisition. His lordship is an enthusiastic writer by profession, but would have us think his enthusiasm polite and rational. Be this as it will, he takes flights sometimes, which George Fox himself need not have been ashamed of. If these rants and friskings of the fancy did either instruct or entertain a reasonable reader, they would not be justly chargeable with contempt for him and his time, both which are miserably trifled with in being obliged to accompany a roving imagination to the utmost distance from what is sought for, and back again, through round-about ways, and sneering apologies. There is another method, by which this writer, with a gross and disingenuous contempt for the understanding of his reader, imposes on his easiness. Being extremely afraid of answers, and desirous that his readers should be at one half of the pains to pervert their own principles, he affects obscurity on the plainest subjects; denies indeed dogmatically, but asserts so sceptically, or rather hypothetically, that neither his disciple, nor his adversary, know well what to lay hold of. When he finds himself in danger, he first bewilders the subject, then calls Christ his Saviour, throws in a word, perhaps, in favour of a future state, digresses to painting and taste, and then lets fly a most offensive volley at the clergy, who press him, and drive him to these shifts. His behaviour is, in this, exactly like that of the stink-bingzem.

Temp. Pray what is that?

Shep. The stink-bingzem is a wild beast about the size of a hare, and as unable to defend itself by strength, although a beast of prey. It infests the country about the Cape of Good Hope. When it is in danger of being overtaken by the hunters, it lets fly, from behind, a blast of such a Stygian scent, as no living creature, that hath a nose, is able to en-

dure. The dogs are immediately thrown out by too much smell, and the huntsmen retire to a distance, as fast as they can, while the delicate creature makes its escape, under the protection of its own atmosphere. In our last dialogue I gave sufficient proof, that, although a clergyman myself, I regard the clergy only as they act up to the true character of their function: this, I hope, will satisfy you, that, when I take notice of his lordship's behaviour to the clergy, I do it not from any prejudice in their favour, but because I think his treatment of them ungenteel. To censure one man for the faults of another, which is always the case when large bodies of men are attacked at once, is so high a pitch of ill manners, that it rises to a crime: for, surely, of all censures, although it levels not at individuals, it is the most unjust and cruel; and, although it is extremely comprehensive, it argues the narrowest heart, the most lumping and undistinguishing sort of malice. His lordship, in the close of his last miscellany, introduces a secular gentleman, as he calls him, into a large company, which, by that distinction, appears to have been made up mostly of clergymen, disputing with them about the possibility of uniformity in religion; which topic, however, is only used as an introduction and pretence to run down Christianity. This gentleman is intended to represent the author, which, indeed, he does most justly; for he is too full of himself to let his opponents say any thing, and artfully spatters the professed religion of the author with the strongest arguments that author could put into his mouth: after this, without the least provocation from the poor dumb creatures, he breaks out into harsh and splenetic invectives against the whole company, charging them with fury, brutality, and want of breeding; and then, without giving them time to reply, shuffles away with an air of disdain. Here are good breeding, humanity, benevolence, love of the species, moral beauty, and social affection, in a high degree! and here, sir, is fine dialogue, by way of example and illustration to all the criticisms his lordship bestows on that kind of writing!

Temp. The proofs you give of his lordship's disingenuity on some occasions, and roughness on others, escaped me when I read him, excepting that I thought him angry with

the clergy, which, indeed, I was far enough from regarding as a fault: but, I assure you, I do not now look upon him with the same degree of admiration.

Shep. As to what I was last speaking of, pray, sir, in case you had found out that a certain person, dressed in a blue coat, was a scoundrel; would you ever afterward tell every man you met in blue, even although in the largest companies, that he is a scoundrel? Would you advertise him such, in the public prints?

Temp. I could hardly be guilty of so great a rudeness and cruelty.

Shep. Change the colour, and suppose it black; will not the case be still the same?

Temp. Undoubtedly.

Shep. You have not seen France and Italy yet, I believe; nor are you, perhaps, an adept in painting?

Temp. No, indeed.

Shep. Suppose a gentleman of your acquaintance should be perpetually telling you, that you are a clown; that you have no taste; that you are ignorant of painting; that you never travelled; but, at the same time, that he himself had made the grand tour, is finely accomplished, and an excellent judge of poetry, painting, sculpture, music, &c. what would you think of him?

Temp. That he was really less a gentleman than myself; and that his behaviour fully overthrew his pretensions.

Shep. What! although he could bow with a good grace, and carry himself with the mien of a man of quality.

Temp. Those are but mere exterior accomplishments. The teachers of dancing, riding, pushing, &c. can no more make a truly genteel person, than a tailor can make a man: nay, the amplest fortune, and the most liberal education, are only helps for that purpose; and, when they are laid out on a mind and person not predisposed by nature to gracefulness and dignity, they only finish him a coxcomb. No one ever had true good breeding, who was self-sufficient and proud of his superiority over such as have not had the advantage of an education as genteel as his. He who affects to display his accomplishments, especially in the odious way of comparisons with plainer people, hath a weak head, that grows giddy even upon an imaginary elevation. The

fine gentleman never seems to think himself, nor takes any pains to make others think him, a fine gentleman; but speaks himself to the world by an unaffected ease and decorum, in all his carriage.

Shep. So much for the author's politeness, who was so over-run with refinement and taste, that he sets up taste as a religion or moral rule of action for the great ones, while he leaves the ignorant and the vulgar to be governed by a belief of future rewards and punishments, which, he intimates, can be of no use to the liberal, polished, and refined part of mankind, such as himself, who, he says, are apt, through the whole course of their lives, to look upon such sanctions as mere narrations and tales; so far are they from the simplicity of babes and sucklings. These are his words, in the second chapter of his third miscellany.

Temp. I remember them very well, and also my own satisfaction in espousing a principle that distinguished me from my own servants, and the vulgar part of mankind. It is diverting enough to reflect on the pleasant alteration this new substitute for theology will make in the reasonings of such as shall become converts to it, and in the fashionable terms, with which they will be obliged to express their sentiments about it. As there is nothing in which mankind are more divided than in their tastes, infinite differences and disputes must needs arise in the sect of tasters. As we give the name of orthodox to that which hath our assent and approbation, they will, on the like occasion, use the words polite, genteel, and elegant; and where we would use the term heterodox, they will express themselves by insipid, rustic, awkward, and inelegant. He who, among us, would be called an honest and upright man, will, by them, be esteemed a fine gentleman; and what we call knavish, or villanous, will, in their language, be denominated unmannerly, or clownish. What is new light among us, will be a new fashion among them.

Shep. To advance the credit of this new-invented religion for people of quality, he, in the same place, makes a jest of conscience, of hell and the devil, and afterward turns them over to the mob: and is it, then, come to this, that we inferior folks must be confined to conscience and a plebeian religion, while you gentlemen of refinement are to be set at

large, and at full liberty to regulate your lives according to your own inclinations and aversions? Since by this scheme the very souls of men are to be distinguished into two ranks, I wish his lordship had appointed a herald, or a master of the ceremonies, to separate the souls of quality from the plebeian, the honourable from the conscientious souls, and to keep us in our places: not that I am afraid I shall be tempted to look upward for better company than he assigns me, but because I know a great many empty and conceited coxcombs, who, although descended of wealthy families, and refined by education and travels into foreign countries, and, of consequence, pretending to an exquisite taste, yet as destitute of it, especially in his lordship's sense, as their footmen. Now these, I know, will be for aping his lordship, and swimming on the top, if there is no one to humble them to an apprehension of hell and the devil: besides, I cannot see how the man of quality can propose making his tour of taste through life, without a suitable train of both sexes, picked from among us lower people, who, upon our sneaking principle of conscience, cannot follow him a single step; and as to taste, we are incapable of ever acquiring it. This noble author hath, indeed, nominated no herald, hath constituted no office to distinguish the slaves of conscience from the followers of taste and honour; yet he hath not left the *beau monde* altogether exposed to the numberless pretensions to, and disputes about, a principle so vague and indeterminable in itself: for, having degraded reason and religion from the office of deciding questions about the fitness or unfitness of things, he hath set up ridicule in their place, by which the man of real taste may easily joke the coxcomb, who only pretends to it, into his proper place among us low wretches, who believe there is another world. His lordship, however, had two other reasons for erecting humour into a criterion for so important a purpose: the thought is new and singular, and, as such, makes the most distinguished ornament of his book. Again, having, through all his former writings, made use of humour instead of reason, and jested his reader into a set of very extraordinary conclusions, lest any one should say it was too ludicrous an instrument for so grave a purpose, as the investigation of truths, of religious truths, being able to prove whatever he

pleased, he proved a jest to be the best middle term in every question: so that his elaborate treatise, which he modestly styles, An Essay on the freedom of Wit and Humour, justly merits the title of, The jocular Logic. Parallel to this is another art made use of by his lordship, unknown to former writers, but hereafter to be imitated by all. The common method followed before his time, in order to make a performance regular and coherent, was, first, to form an idea of certain rules for writing, and then to model the matter, and adjust the style, to those rules. To have run in this old beaten track would have looked too slavish, formal, and stiff, for so great a genius, who is as absolute a libertine in criticism as religion: he therefore ventured on a way more free and bold, first writing many of his treatises without any rule at all; after this, he drew from these writings such critical rules as might serve the purposes of all other authors, as Aristotle did the rules of epic poetry from Homer. Our author's method (if we can call it so) may be termed the obscure, or the desultory method, the patch-work, the riff-raff, the hotch-potch of the *belles lettres*. Having wrote a good deal in this way, he wrote almost as much more to shew the excellence both of his method and execution, as also to correct and reduce the unpolished world to a taste for his new standard: thus one treatise produced another, and the example came before the rule. In like manner, as he had intermixed a world of flights and rants with his works, which, in a close inquiry after truth and controverted points, will not readily seem proper to an ordinary reader, he shews, in his Advice to an Author, that this is an excellent ingredient in good writing; and, to support himself with an indisputable authority (an uncommon condescension in one who is wholly original, and above all imitation), he proves that Plato's dialogues are poems. As he had an incomparable talent at the obscure, he affects, professes, and defends it: as he never sticks a moment to any point, so he labours in the defence of the rhapsodical and miscellaneous manner, in opposition to the methodical formality used by the clergy in their discourses. By these means the defects, as another would call them, of his lordship's performances being recommended by himself, as examples to his own rules, and patterns for imitation, are to become, for the fu-

ture, the chief ornaments and excellences of all other writings. That you may have all his book at once, and over again, when you read any part of it, he every where refers you to himself, sometimes backward and sometimes forward, by above three hundred marginal quotations. As his books are made up of a fortuitous concourse of paragraphs, this, and his large index, are the only cement that connects and methodizes his matter. An author who affects confusion, and digresses at such a rate as he does, may refer from any one place to any one place, being every where, beginning, middle, and end. His inquiry concerning virtue is indeed a regular and well-digested piece, wherein the errors and absurdities of the author come forward in rank and file, and so orderly, that the reader may pick out the drift, provided he gives a close attention. Nevertheless, if he compares what he says in one place with what he lays down in another of that performance concerning evil, and the belief of future rewards and punishments, he will find it no easy matter to trace out his opinion. As he makes the distinction between moral good and evil, and the nature and force of obligation, to arise from the affections, he is obliged to separate the affections into two classes, the natural and unnatural; by which means the all-sufficient nature of man is, by his system, acquitted and discharged of evil, which, according to him, is foreign to us, and unnatural. But when this stroke of art comes to be closely considered, and compared with the nature of man, it appears, that the worst of men hath no passion or affection in him, which is not found in all men, and did not originally make a part of human nature.

Temp. Was our nature, then, originally evil?

Shep. By no means: but the evil we find in our affections springs not from any new additional affections; it only takes its rise from the perversion and corruption of the old, or natural. If all the unnatural affections, in his lordship's catalogue, are examined, they will appear to make a part of our nature, and to derive their malignity wholly from excess, misapplication, and corruption: for the nature of a bad man is by no means enlarged, but only altered; and therefore, had not his lordship been more studious of novelty than truth, he would have traced up moral evil to in-

ordinate affection, rather than to unnatural or adventitious affections.

Temp. Pray be so good as to exemplify this by an instance.

Shep. He places envy among his unnatural affections; and yet, in all children it is one of the first that makes its appearance; which could not happen were it not natural in our present state of corruption. Is not self-love natural to us?

Temp. It is.

Shep. Is not the best man apt to be uneasy when he finds himself destitute of somewhat ornamental or pleasing, which he sees others in possession of?

Temp. I believe he may.

Shep. Does he not endeavour to acquire that possession if he hath a probability of doing it, without injustice or injury to any man?

Temp. He does.

Shep. So far he is only acted by a natural self-love: but when he not only desires the good for its own sake, but that he may be on a level with the man in whom he admires it; how do you call the affection he is then acted by?

Temp. It is emulation.

Shep. Whence proceeds emulation?

Temp. From a mixture of self-love and pride.

Shep. Is emulation a vice?

Temp. I think not.

Shep. Pride, then, may be natural and unblamable, in some instances; may it not?

Temp. I think it may.

Shep. But when the person, who desires the good he admires in others, instead of endeavouring to obtain the like himself by laudable means, feels an inclination to rob others of it; and, being unable to do so, is filled with discontent and hatred; what do you call him?

Temp. I pronounce him envious.

Shep. You see, then, his envy proceeds from mere natural affections, which, by means of his inability, either to gratify or subdue them, become vicious and detestable.

Temp. I see clearly; and that his lordship's distinction

comes to nothing. Envy is, indeed, no affection, but only the perversion of two affections.

Shep. This lord is much admired as a writer, whose sentiments are fine, and style beautiful; and, in many places, they certainly deserve it: he is, however, in the main, obscure, confused, desultory, and affected. There cannot, therefore, be a more improper writer for the hands of a young man, who would acquire a clearness of conception, together with a natural and elegant habit of expression; because his beauties serve only to pass his enormous defects on the undiscerning reader. His performances, which convey an infinity of bad principles, of self-sufficiency, conceit, confusion, and affectation,[a] into minds as yet unformed, under the cover of superficial reasonings, and a glare of false wit, should be considered as lumps of poison, wrapped in leaf-gold; the covering thin, and the poison massy. All the young men, on whom the experiment hath been made, prove the truth of what I am here asserting: they no sooner read these books, than they become conceited, pert, and self-sufficient. Having little knowledge, and yet setting up for a great deal, they adopt his lordship's expressions, and discover a world of affectation, so despicable and offensive, that one cannot converse with them, for half an hour, without pity and impatience. But well it were, if this was all; we find in them a foundation laid for infidelity, if not a superstructure already carried to the highest story, and a channel opened for a torrent of impiety and vice to pour itself on the whole course of their future lives. It is more to be lamented, than wondered at, that his lordship should be the favourite author of young men; for he was near their stage of life when he wrote, and therefore his gay and airy way is too conformable to their turn of mind, not to be highly approved of. Besides, he feeds their vanity, and gives them a loose, which they are much apter to make an ill use of than he was. The feeble bridle of moral beauties and deformities, and a strong desire to prove to the world, that his principles were sufficient, might have kept so bookish, so speculative, and so sickly a young man, within some

[a] God-governed, Miraculize, Deity in the abstract, as if it were a species; in the cause of Deity, self-passions, miracle-proof, cult for worship. Forming the Dual number for dividing, in order to converse with one's self, &c.

bounds: but it does by no means follow, that the generality of our youths, exposed to the most violent passions from within, and the most alluring temptations from without, stand in need of no other restraints.

Temp. Although his lordship's writings gave me high notions of virtue, yet, I freely own, they did not, by any means, inspire me with a proportionable ardour to reduce them to practice. This did not a little recommend him to me as a writer; and, I verily believe, is with readers, such as I was, the greatest beauty in his performances, if not the very thing that makes such liberties and affectations please in him, as would disgust in an author of less soothing principles.

Shep. Your confession is worth all my remarks.

But it is time to pass to another, whose style and manner, being unworthy of notice, will not detain us; I mean Toland, who, being the natural son of an Irish priest, was educated a Papist, afterward turned Presbyterian, and then Deist: this pretender to scholarship was of a mean and despicable genius, without any one considerable talent but cunning; which, however, he made so dexterous a use of that it served him for judgment, learning, and every other accomplishment; insomuch that he passed with many, in Prussia and England, for a man of letters, and particularly, for a great linguist. He was sent over, by the fraternity of Deists on this side of the water, to propagate infidelity in Ireland, with appointments sufficient to support him in the rank of a gentleman: he no sooner arrived in Dublin, than his zeal for so good a cause prompted him to too open an exposure of himself and his principles; insomuch that, the clergy of that city taking the alarm, he had the mortification, the first Sunday after he set his foot on the Irish shore, to make one in an auditory, to which the preacher addressed a sermon, filled, from beginning to end, with severe, but just invectives against him. Such treatment in his own country, you may be sure, could not but ruffle one who was among the foremost even of his own fraternity in conceit and self-sufficiency. In his passion he kept no measures, but ran into such wild indecencies, as soon made him ridiculous, and forced him to return in a huff, before his money was out,

or he had done any thing for it. After his return, having supped, by invitation, with a wealthy Deist, a spoon was missing: poor Toland, as it is said, was suspected of the fact by his brethren, not because they were conscious of better principles than his, but, probably, because he was needy, and an Irishman: after being thought capable of such an action, by his own Deistical friends, others cannot have a high idea of his morals: yet this person, despicable as he was, had a very important province committed to his pen by the club: it was no less than that of proving Christianity to be not mysterious: in which, under pretence of defending revelation against the charge of mysteriousness, he set himself, with all his might, to prove that God could never require the belief of a mystery, or a point too high to be accounted for; and then, with little more than mere assertions, and texts of Scripture, which he neither did nor could prove to be applicable to his purpose; he, by design, weakly shews, that nothing in the gospel dispensation is now mysterious, or incomprehensible. Although he abounds with professions of the highest regard for Christianity, yet he labours hard to prove the first; but, as to the last, touches neither on the incarnation, nor the Trinity; leaving our religion to answer, after all, for those and other mysteries, which he hath been at so much pains to prove could never be made objects of our faith by Almighty God. This author was under no necessity of endeavouring to write clumsily, or reason weakly, as is evident to any candid reader, who peruses that part of his performance, where he intends to be demonstrative. Were not all the other Deistical writers guilty of the same, or a like artifice, I should charge the spoon on Toland. He who, in the mask of a Christian, gets admittance into the minds of his readers, in order to steal away their principles of religion and honesty, not to enrich his own, but only to disfurnish their minds; may, without a breach of charity, be thought capable of a theft, that puts something in his pocket.

Temp. That story of the theft is a very strange one. Was it not as natural to suppose some of the servants pocketed the spoon?

Shep. The honourable company were best able to judge whether a Christian servant, or a Deistical gentleman, was the most likely to be a thief.

Temp. True.

Shep. This worthy teacher of Deism, not foreseeing whether any of his ingenious brethren would honour his memory with an epitaph, wrote one for himself; in which his vanity, and bad Latin, outlive him, and in which, among other things highly panegyrical, he tells the world he understood above ten languages.

Temp. Above! Quere, Did he understand eleven, or not?

Shep. His epitaph, you see, is mysterious, although Christianity is not; but it was so long, that all he died worth was not sufficient to purchase him a tombstone large enough to contain it.

PRAY, Mr. Templeton, did you ever hear that the Inquisition is established in England?

Temp. No, indeed.

Shep. Well, you will find it is, if you read over Mr. Collins's preface to his Grounds, &c. or else be forced to believe he wrote it for the meridian of Rome, or Madrid. He therein makes the most lamentable and bitter outcries for want of liberty to write or speak one's mind upon religious subjects. Till I saw this performance, I thought there had not been a country under heaven where so great encouragement is given to books published against the established religion, as in this. The use he would make of greater liberty, were it granted him, appears, by his use of that liberty, or rather indulgence, he had; which was nothing more than to introduce into the world another piece of knavery of the same kind with that of the despicable Toland. In his first chapter he asserts, that the New Testament is founded on the Old, or Christianity on Judaism; but does not so much as attempt to prove, that it is founded on nothing else: yet, as if this latter had been fully proved, he thinks he can totally destroy Christianity by shewing, that the only foundation he allows it is unsound. For this he hath a trick that is wondrously ingenious. He first labours to prove, that the prophecies of the Old Testament are, as applied in the New, to be understood only allegorically or typically: for this he calls in the authority of Surenhusius, and then mangles and abridges that writer's

whimsical scheme for the allegorical interpretation, in his application of it to the particular prophecies cited in the New Testament, from the Old. By these means he makes that interpretation (according to him the best, or only interpretation) appear altogether absurd and ridiculous: yet, all this time, if you will believe himself, Collins is a Christian, and is at all this trouble merely for the good of Christianity. He carefully avoids taking the least notice, that Christianity is founded on miracles of its own in the writings of all Christian apologists, as well as Judaism. Till, therefore, this latter foundation is destroyed, what I have here said in a few words, in order only to detect and expose his low chicane, is a sufficient answer to his whole book. The same author, in another celebrated performance, after giving us a definition of Freethinking,[a] which fits nothing but the mere act of judging (for it contains no idea of freedom), recommends it as necessary to the acquiring knowledge of every kind, particularly of religion: having thus begun to trifle with the reader, he proceeds immediately to impose on him by an artifice, which one would hardly expect from so silly a beginning. He tells us, 'the Bible contains a collection of tracts given us, at divers times, by God himself;' and insists, that, as it is the work of God, it must be wrote 'with the greatest exactness:' yet he says, 'there is not, perhaps, in the world so miscellaneous a book;' and endeavours to shew, that it is impossible to understand it, without vast knowledge in history, chronology, mathematics, physics, ethics, architecture, &c. from whence he infers the necessity of freethinking, in order to the attainment of right notions in theology, that is, in order to the distinguishing from true religion, certain articles of faith contained in the Scriptures, which he does not expressly mention, but figures to us, with a little mixture of Popish superstitions, by some trick of legerdemain. Having laid this foundation, he then endeavours to prove, that Christians have no better notions of God, and his attributes, than others; and that the Scriptures are corrupt and unintelligible. All this is professedly done for the service of Christianity. Thus this gentleman recommends

[a] See A Discourse of Freethinking, &c.

freethinking by a most perfidious dealing, and leads his reader to a search after truth by a system of chicane and dissimulation.

Temp. Such mean artifices are altogether unworthy of a gentleman, to say nothing of a champion for liberty, and a guide to truth.

Shep. LET us now turn our eyes to the great apostle of Deism, who, in his last comprehensive work, hath exhausted what is said by all the other libertine writers, and summed the whole force of their cause, insomuch that this book is become the Bible of all Deistical readers: I mean Tindal; in comparison of whom, Toland is but a pedant, Collins a sophister, and his lordship himself a trifler. This great man gave himself a better opportunity of looking sharply into religion, and seeing its weak side, than Deists usually do. In the reign of Charles the Second he was a Protestant, in that of James the Second a Papist, and, after the Revolution, he conformed to the Church of England; which, for want of another Revolution, he was forced, in outward profession, to adhere to, during the rest of his life: yet not so scrupulously, but that he set himself to ruin that church, and to destroy not only revelation, but, I may say, all religion; first by his 'Rights of the Christian Church,' and afterward by his 'Christianity as old as the Creation.' After doubling thus upon the scent, not of truth, but of his worldly interests, we are not to wonder at seeing the looseness of his principles, either in his books, or by his life and conversation. Whether he drew his dispensations from his Popery, or his Deism, I know not; however, he acted as freely as he thought, and exemplified what he wrote by what he did. His principles were not, like those of some other Deists, merely whimsical and speculative, but highly serviceable to the pleasing or profitable purposes, for which they were chosen. They cost him his conscience, and his character; and therefore, not to have turned them to some account, would have been ill management. I shall not rake into the detestable particulars, which are still remembered by many, of whom some do, nevertheless, admire his writings, and adhere to his principles.

Temp. How can we conceive, that any rational creature should ever become the disciple of such a wretch?

Shep. It is easily enough accounted for. People at a distance from London and Oxford, either never heard of his pranks, or, if they did, looked on them as only the inventions of Christians. As to those who knew full well the life he led, and yet became his followers; it was, with them, far from being an objection to his principles, that they countenanced lewdness, and other vices, because no other principles could make them easy. Nothing so strongly recommended them to their liking, as to see their pleasing effects on both the fortune and pleasures of him, who had contended so strenuously for them in his writings.

Temp. You said just now, that he aimed at the destruction of all religion: how does that appear?

Shep. In his 'Christianity as old as the Creation,' he uses several arguments, which, if admitted, must end in downright Atheism. This the answerers of that book took notice of, and he never attempted to clear those arguments of the consequence.

Temp. Is it not agreed, that writers are not answerable for the consequences that may be drawn from what they publish?

Shep. If a writer is charged with such consequences as that mentioned, and neither refutes the charge, nor renounces them, it is then taken for granted, that the consequences made, from the beginning, a part of his intendment: but if that prayer was his, which by the public is ascribed to him, it shews he was not far from the Atheism of Epicurus; since he therein expresses himself to this effect, "If thou art at all concerned for one so insignificant as I am, &c." and that which he is reported to have used a little before his death, "If there is a God, I desire he may have mercy on me;" shews he was within a hair's breadth of Atheism, at the time when men are apt to discover all the religion they have. Both, however, serve as a key to his life and writings.

Temp. Some people take his last work to be a defence of Christianity against the objection, that it came too late into the world.

Shep. It passes at first on the ignorant reader, under

that notion; but as he proceeds, he finds Christianity refuted by that very objection which the author urges as his chief argument against our religion.

Temp. And so although in the title page, Christianity is as old as the Creation; in the body of the work its antiquity is shortened by four thousand years.

Shep. Yes; and that which is juggled into the place of it, and christened with its name, is the religion of nature.

Temp. That religion, I suppose, which made the author so good a Christian.

Shep. Even that. Here the sharper shews himself in the writer so plainly, that his readers must share largely in the merit of imposing on themselves, before they can become proselytes to opinions, that stand in need of arts like these, to recommend them.

Temp. THAT scheme of libertinism, which compliments human nature with self-sufficiency, and turns its best side outward to a superficial observer, is, in my opinion as well as yours, a flat contradiction to common experience: but I long to hear your remarks on the 'Fable of the Bees,' which represents mankind as a sort of devils, and makes vice the spring of every thing they do, not excepting their best actions. You will own, I believe, that vanity and self-sufficiency could not have dictated so severe a satire on the whole human species, and, of consequence, on the author himself.

Shep. I am very far from owning any such thing, since, if I did, the whole work itself would contradict me. The writer does not so much as pretend to be of a different make from all other men, whom he represents under the influence of vanity, as the first mover of all they think or do. When this book was penned, self-sufficiency had, in a greater or less degree, taken possession of all the writers and readers among us. What principle, therefore, could Mandeville have defended, that would have given him so high an air of singularity as the one he chose, and yet at the same time have shewn his contempt for religion? If Hobbes had not lived before him, he must have even carried off the credit of an inventor. Of all the writers on the side of infidelity, this had the greatest stock of wit and experience: his style

indeed is a little lumpish; but it is clear and strong. The eloquence of Ulysses is, in Homer, compared to a shower of snow; but that of Mandeville is like a shower of stones, that flattens all the inclosures of virtue, and leaves a frightful face of ruin behind it. Shaftsbury labours to prove mankind, of whom he knew but little, benevolent, public spirited, and by nature good. Mandeville takes as much pains to prove them the reverse of all this. These authors both attack Christianity, but from quite opposite quarters, and on contrary plans. A Christian may leave them to shoot wide of what they aim at, and hit one another; but a libertine, who hath a ready faith for any thing that promises to rid him of a troublesome religion, gives often as full an assent to both, as a libertine hath to give, and serves himself with the arguments and sneers of both. All things are right and true, although ever so repugnant to one another, that help to hunt from his conscience such an inmate as Christianity. These allies of his, enemies as they are to each other, are called in to combat the present invader of his repose and pleasures: and although when the victory shall be obtained, and religion banished, he can never reconcile them; yet he knows well enough how to keep them quiet, having room in his capacious mind to billet contradictions at such a distance from one another, as to prevent their interfering and jarring at any time. In most controversies, truth is on one side or other, or at least in the middle; but in this, between Shaftsbury and Mandeville, it is really nowhere: men are not what either represents them. We are not to thank the mere nature of man, whether good or bad, but somewhat of a more excellent and beneficent disposition, for the assistances and services we receive from man. If all the good that is done for the pure abstracted love of virtue, were separated from that which flows from other motives, it would not be sufficient to set up one truly honest man, not to say a saint or a hero, much less the whole species of heroes: and as to the good that is done by vice, it can be no argument in favour of vice, the natural tendency of which is only evil; but shews the wisdom of God, who hath so constituted the nature of man, and the world he hath placed him in, that good results at last even from evil itself.

Temp. I never thought these two writers so opposite: for

if the doctor tells us, that 'private malefits' are 'public benefits;' the peer maintains, that particular evil is general good.

Shep. It is true: but why then doth the doctor attack his lordship with so much animosity?

Temp. I really don't know.

Shep. It was because they entertained a quite opposite opinion of mankind, and each founded his peculiar system on his own opinion of the species; which opinion, because it was a favourite, he thought he could not possibly indulge too much, or carry too far.

Temp. You have, to my great satisfaction, laid open the peculiar artifice of each libertine performance, hitherto taken into our consideration: but pray, what is the trick or stratagem of the Independent Whig? That performance abounds with very emphatical professions of love, and even zeal, for Christianity: contains little or nothing, at least that I could observe, of Deistical principles; and seems to meddle with hardly any thing else than the vices of the clergy, which it labours to reform: a design, in my opinion, truly laudable; and, considering the times we live in, neither unseasonable nor unworthy the pen of a Christian writer. It is true, the writers of these papers lash the clergy with excessive acrimony: but this seems purely the effect of an overheated zeal for Christianity; since, towards the beginning of that work, they speak of your office in terms full of respect and affection, and contrary to the usual practice of libertines, distinguishing the good clergy from the bad, profess as high a regard for the former, as disesteem for the latter: but what contributed more than all this, to convince me of their zeal and hearty attachment to our religion, is their declaring, that libertinism did not arise from any want of evidence in favour of Christianity, but from the ill lives of the priests; and that a good and truly pious ministry might, with the greatest ease, extirpate that poisonous plant, notwithstanding its having spread so far, and struck its roots so deep.

Shep. There is no one thing in the world that better suits with a rational and religious mind, than a calm dispassionate endeavour to trace up whatsoever happens, though ever so seemingly evil in its nature and tendency, to a wise design,

or, at least, permission, of Providence. I have often considered the book, you speak of, in this light. As we have little or no discipline to regulate the behaviour of the clergy; as the friends of that order are too tender to chastise, and expose the unsounder part of those who fill it; and as those among us, who have some regard for religion, have yet more for their own safety, and their worldly views; such books as the Independent Whig, might be of singular use, if duly attended to by the clergy; for although in some places they ridicule what is right and good, in others they scourge our real errors and enormities. The just providence of God, since we will not exercise a due discipline on ourselves, lays on us the severer discipline of our enemies, in letting loose such performances against us, which in part answer ends more agreeable to the Divine permission, than the intention of their writers.

Temp. You look upon the authors of this work then, as enemies to our religion?

Shep. Friends never reprove with bitterness like theirs; and therefore we may be sure the reformation of those they rail at and ridicule, makes no part of their intention. If they bestow encomiums on a few of the clergy, it is but to gain credit, with undiscerning people, to their professions of zeal for Christianity, and to the invectives with which they load the rest. These invectives and reproaches, thus gilded, go glibly down with numbers who are yet Christians, and fill them with a too general distaste for the clergy. Hence arises a settled disinclination to their advice, as well public as private; which keeps them at a distance from both, and at the same time lays them open to the poison of libertinism, infused by the books and conversation of those, who by degrees, and artfully, although a little more openly, insinuate their arguments against Christianity. Thus these men of candour cover what they utter against the clergy in the bitterness of their souls, under specious protestations of regard for our religion, and labour in the support of Deism against that religion by prejudice alone, while they leave the argumentative part of a work, so base and disingenuous, to others, who wear a thinner mask.

Temp. Such, I must own, hath been the effect of the per-

formance under censure; but how doth this appear to have been the design of its authors?

Shep. Do you know who those authors were?

Temp. I do.

Shep. Were they not known to be Deists?

Temp. They were generally so reported.

Shep. Did not some of them, particularly Collins, publish distinct treatises against Christianity?

Temp. They did.

Shep. What interpretation, then, are you to put on their warm professions of zeal for Christianity? Can you imagine such persons had a real intention to promote its credit by a reformation of the ministry, the very greatest service that could be rendered it?

Temp. How necessary a thing it is to the happiness of mankind, that such detestable deceivers should be unmasked to the whole world!

Shep. A farther proof of their bad intentions may be gathered from that very observation of yours, on which you founded your too favourable opinion of them, namely, their distinguishing between the good and the bad clergyman. Who is their good clergyman? Phyodexius, that vain-glorious patroniser of dissensions, and erroneous doctrines, so cried up by men like himself, for his artful writings against all his solemn subscriptions and declarations. And who is their bad clergyman? The bishop of Man, than whom no age of Christianity, nor of the world, hath ever produced a more faithful and exemplary pastor, nor a more upright man. To have run down the one, and applauded the other, is a sufficient key to the designs of these authors, and may serve for a refutation of their whole performance, till it shall please God to give it a full answer in an entire reformation of the clergy. In the mean time that clergyman best repels the poison of this chicaning book, who lives and acts as a clergyman should do. All other clergymen, although they should write ten thousand volumes against it, do but exhibit to mankind a confirmation of what is urged therein; do but argue on the side of its authors, and shamefully publish to the world a new edition of this attack on Christianity, in their own conduct. The Independent Whig shews his aver-

sion to Christianity by what he says against fasting. He is indeed as much in the right, as a Deist can be, to ridicule that, and all other acts of mortification. Our passions keep pace with our blood, that with our appetites, and those again with the greater or less degree of indulgence shewn them. Now the appetites, and, if mortification do not prevent it, the passions of all men, are more or less excessive, through natural corruption or habit; and consequently call for different degrees of strength and activity in the governing principle, which is reason; but reason without religion, or both without mortification, are too weak to subdue the passions, especially in ranker constitutions. The gratification of our desires and passions being attended with pleasure, religion, and whatsoever else restrains that gratification, must be in some degree distasteful to our corrupt nature, and the more, as the passions and appetites are stronger. Mortification therefore not only aids religion, but helps to abate or remove the reluctance of nature to religion. It is for this reason that a Deist, as such, must be an enemy to mortification; for the grand inducement to libertinism is sensuality, or love of pleasure; but that inducement loses as much of its force in a person subdued by mortification, as it does in one debilitated to the same degree by sickness. Hence it is, that all libertines, and the Independent Whig among the rest, represent it as a churlish sort of sin, to refuse at any time the good creatures God hath provided for us, out of which they never except the artificial and provocative articles of luxury. This they do, in order to induce their disciples to a free and unstinted use of meat, drink, ease and softness. As soon as, in obedience to these soothing lessons, the appetites have laid in a sufficient store, the passions immediately grow high and hot; and then religion must talk nonsense, or tell lies, if it preaches up abstinence from the allurements of a harlot, &c. as a necessary duty; or says, that abstinence in eating and drinking is any help to abstinence from lewdness, or a means of preserving us humble, meek, and patient. Whatever reason religion may have to call in the assistance of fasting and mortification, irreligion hath the same for objecting to them. It is certainly far from being a thing indifferent to the dispute about religion, whether it is at any time a duty, or a point

of prudence, to deny ourselves whatsoever our desires may demand, and our fortunes give us.

Temp. I perceive the artifice of this performance lies very deep, and conceals a vast magazine of mischief at the bottom. However, fasting, which is against nature, and may be prejudicial to health, cannot surely be acceptable to God.

Shep. Not in itself, nor for its own sake, but only as it tends to subdue our inordinate affections, and render us more amenable to his laws; which, by a discreet management, it may do, without in the least impairing the health of such as stand in need of it.

Temp. I must confess, Mr. Shepherd, I have no great idea of its efficacy for that purpose. How can mere bodily applications or expedients work a change in the passions, which are mental and internal?

Shep. Our passions and affections are purely animal; and, being placed, as it were, between the soul and body, become the medium or instrument, by which the spiritual and corporeal part of our nature mutually act and re-act upon each other. When these instruments have too much energy of their own, the springs of thought and action are wound too high; from whence proceed violent perturbations in the mind, and often dangerous disorders of the body, by which both health and virtue are impaired. Now it is found by experience, that the passions and affections draw their fuel through the body from the quality and quantity of its nourishment. It is with us in this respect, as it is with other animals, high-feeding exalts our passions, and abstaining reduces them. Pray, Mr. Templeton, have we not our bodies and passions in common with the brute creation?

Temp. We certainly have.

Shep. What rule do you observe in feeding your horses?

Temp. I keep them pretty high in flesh.

Shep. Not so high, I suppose, as to tempt them to run away with you?

Temp. By no means.

Shep. No, you only give them provender sufficient for strength and activity; but you go no farther; for you do not wholly trust either to the strength of your bridle, or to

your own skill in keeping your seat. But why do I talk of horses? Many of us seem to borrow our passions from bears, tigers, and lions, rather than from more manageable animals.

Temp. Nothing more true.

Shep. The keen appetites of such men are perpetually at work to pamper their passions. Earth, air, and sea, are ransacked for articles of luxury; and those things, that are in themselves too high for common food, must be raised still higher, before they can come up to their palates, by seasonings and sauces, which it is the business of an art more extensive and refined than the mathematics, to prepare for them. To a meal, consisting of ingredients thus fitted for the purpose, they sit down, before the last is half digested; and, having eat as long as they are able, spend the remainder of the day, and sometimes the night too, in swallowing great quantities of the highest wines, or other inflaming liquors. All this, however, would be but a tasteless entertainment, were it not seasoned with soft music, wanton songs, libertine conversation, and flattery: in what a condition, think you, are their passions after having been thus regaled?

Temp. I have made the experiment too often on myself not to be sensible of its effects.

Shep. In such a case each passion is seized with a distemper peculiar to itself. Pride is swelled to frenzy; anger is inflamed to madness; lust is putrefied with a leprosy. Consideration, in the mean time, snorts itself to death in a lethargy; conscience languishes in a deep palsy; and reason, the glory and boast of man, the lord and governor of human nature, hath nothing else to do, but to contrive a better dinner for to-morrow, to look out for other articles of sensuality, on which the passions, thus enraged, may be employed, and to hunt for such principles, as may countenance that employment. If the person, prepared in this manner for mischief, is only in a private station, a hundred, or a thousand wretches, are all that can suffer by him; but, if he is a king, his own, and all the nations bordering on it, must expect to be visited with the sword and slaughter. Human blood must furnish sauce to his dishes; and the cannon, together with the groans of dying men, must supply

music to his meals. The pride and ambition, the lust and cruelty, of such men, may be all traced to their tables, and found, as in their seeds, among their dishes and bottles. Now, sir, invert the supposition; let men be temperate at all times, which to an epicure is, I own, a continual fast. But if this treatment of their passions is too gentle to subdue them, and they are still in danger of relapsing into riot and sensuality, let them go farther, and on some occasions, fast, and mortify their affections: may not a cool head, and governable passions, be expected? Don't contrary causes produce contrary effects? And will not a mind, in this calm and dispassionate disposition, be better able to steer its way to truth, to religion, and devotion, than in the midst of such a storm as that we have been describing? By this time you may see the reasons, that induced the authors of the book we are speaking of, to write against fasting and mortification.

Temp. I see them; I feel them; and condemn myself of folly for not having been sooner sensible of them.

Shep. Among all the books wrote either for or against religion, this is one of the most superficial, and therefore the best adapted to a shallow reader, who hath not literature enough to be caught with artful quotations, nor sufficient understanding to be imposed on by an appearance of reason. It is made up of bitter words, flashes of wit, and smart reflections; by which it is qualified to carry down irreligion to the meanest capacities, to turn the slave into a libertine, the fool into a witling, and set a sort of edge on minds too dull and stupid to be sharpened, but in the way of profaneness. Having dwelt sufficiently on this performance, it is time to call another. Pray, sir, have you read Woolston on the miracles of our Saviour?

Temp. I have, and will save you the trouble of remarking on a wretch beneath all criticism. When my admiration for libertine writers was at the highest, I looked on his performance with contempt. His pitiful trick of refuting the miracles, under pretence of allegorizing them, is so stale and barefaced, his style so low and rude, and his attempts to reason so absurd and senseless, that I could not help looking on him as a very despicable fellow, who was on the shift for bread.

Shep. Yet, as he had been more impudent and indecent

than the rest of the deistical writers, he passed for a hero among his own tribe; and his picture, I am told, found a place in the closets of some very great personages.

Temp. ENOUGH of him. I am impatient to hear your remarks on 'Christianity not founded on argument;' a performance that contributed more to my being a libertine, than all the other deistical writings.

Shep. It is indeed more artfully executed than the rest, its sophistry is deeper, and the humour, which is remote and delicate, seems, at first sight, rather to be suggested by the weak side of religion, than to proceed from the industry of the writer. The matter of this performance is said to have been clubbed for by Tindal's disciples, a set of men whose debaucheries and blasphemies would have rendered them infamous in any other age or country but their own. As to the artifice, on which it is planned, it consists in pushing the arguments of divines concerning the deficiencies of reason, and the necessity of divine revelation and grace, to the utmost extremity, that the reader may think it impossible to be a Christian without shutting his eyes, and shaking hands with reason and common sense. To this end, the texts of Scripture that set forth the necessity of God's assistance in order to saving faith, and a good life, are much insisted on; and such as strongly recommend the use of our senses and reason in judging of religion, are kept out of sight. The truth is, human nature, in order to its becoming effectually religious and virtuous, requires two things; the one that reason should be convinced; for which purpose, prophecies, miracles, and arguments, are made use of; the other, that the will should be inclined, in which consists the peculiar office of grace. Reason cannot be convinced, nor faith excited, without arguments; nor will arguments do either, unless they are attended to by a mind unbiassed. God's Holy Spirit alone can take off the universal bias against religion, that lies on the corrupt and sensual minds of all men, and produce in them an attention to the arguments in favour of religion. Hence appear distinctly the respective offices of reason and grace, in order to an effectual faith; and hence may be easily understood and explained whatsoever is said in Scripture, when the former is appealed to, or the latter

said to be necessary, before we can believe any otherwise than as the devils do. Attention is necessary to conviction, and grace to attention; and whereas, after the reason of a man is thoroughly reconciled to religion, he may still continue wicked, so that his conviction shall only serve to condemn, not reform him, it is evident, that God's assistance is here also necessary to apply his conviction to his will, to press it home upon his passions, and to give life and vigour to his faith.

Temp. There is one thing, on which a great part of that book is made to depend, that seemed clearly to establish his main point, concerning the necessity of abdicating reason entirely, in order to our continuing Christians, after having been educated in Christianity. He says, the Scriptures make it highly criminal to apostatize from the faith, or even to doubt; and he farther says, what I think cannot be denied, that no one can fairly examine into principles, while he continues prejudiced in their favour. From hence, I think, it clearly follows, that no man, educated a Christian, is at liberty, when he comes to the use of reason, to inquire effectually into the grounds of his faith; and yet, without such an inquiry, what he believes may as well be an absurdity, or a falsehood, as a truth; which seems to make the faith of a Christian a very precarious thing.

Shep. Pray, Mr. Templeton, can a man lay aside, and wholly divest himself of, a preconceived opinion, without reason?

Temp. He cannot.

Shep. It is impossible, therefore, for any man ever to change his opinions.

Temp. How is that?

Shep. Why, he cannot examine his former opinion, without first laying it aside; and he cannot lay it aside, and become neutral, without first candidly considering the arguments against it, and suffering them to preponderate.

Temp. This indeed runs the argument to a contradictory circle, and I know not what to say to it.

Shep. Let this argument of our author, thus levelled at Christianity, be tried on Deism, and we shall quickly see its fallacy. Be pleased, sir, for a moment to take on you the person of a Deist, and you will soon know what to say.

Temp. I will.

Shep. As you are already a Deist, you cannot fairly examine the truth of Deism, if you do not first cease to be a Deist.

Temp. I own, I cannot do that, before I hear the arguments against Deism, and am convinced by them.

Shep. But you cannot be convinced by them, although they are never so strong, if you continue under your deistical prejudice; therefore that must be cashiered previously to the examination of those arguments.

Temp. The thing is plain. Pray whence arises this embarrassment?

Shep. From setting out on a wrong principle. All libertines lay it down for a maxim, and others too readily grant it, that it is impossible for a man candidly to examine his prejudices, without first laying them aside, and becoming perfectly neutral, or indifferent to his former opinions.

Temp. It will be hard to make me doubt the truth of this maxim.

Shep. You will quickly perceive it to be a downright fallacy. Are you of opinion that cane in your hand belongs to you?

Temp. I am.

Shep. But as two canes may be very like each other, it may possibly be mine; will you give a fair hearing to the arguments, on which I build my claim to it?

Temp. I will.

Shep. You are still strongly of opinion it is yours.

Temp. I am indeed, and will keep possession till the contrary shall be made appear.

Shep. In this instance, sir, although you retain your opinion in its full strength, yet you are qualified to judge, as an honest man should do, whether that opinion ought to be persevered in, or the reasons of my claim yielded to.

Temp. The force of what you say is not to be resisted. An honest mind, although still attached by prejudice to an opinion, or by self-interest to a property, may nevertheless decide in either case with candour.

Shep. Yes, but the arguments that prevail on him to quit his attachments, must have more apparent strength in them, than those attachments, which in a disingenuous mind they

seldom have; and therefore such minds are very unfit judges in all questions concerning their own opinions or claims.

Temp. You do not intend, I hope, to finish your criticisms, before you give me your sentiments of the Moral Philosopher, and the posthumous works of Mr. Chubb.

Shep. You was much in the right on't to join these together; for it was but one spirit, precisely one kind and degree of vanity, that taught them to wrangle and scribble themselves out of the religion they were educated in, and this by steps so parallel, that they seem to have been tied to each other by the same yoke, and driven down the miry path to Deism by the same evil genius. What gives them still a greater resemblance, is, that they attack religion from the same battery, discharge against it the same arguments (only Chubb is a little more particular), make their approaches by the same winding trenches, and work under its foundations in the same mine. They are both very good Christians; yet maintain, as all other libertines do, that the church hath in all ages departed from the simplicity of Christ's religion, and that the very evangelists and apostles misunderstood their Master, and knew little of him or his doctrines. They allow him the character of a teacher sent from God; nay, the Moral Philosopher goes so far as to insist on the absolute necessity of revelation;[a] but at the same time they both labour to prove, that the revelation made by Christ neither was, nor could be, of any use to mankind.

Temp. Most preposterous! Was a revelation necessary? Did God actually make one? And was it so distorted and perverted by the very persons, through whose hands he chose to convey it to us, as to disappoint the intention of God, and deprive the world of all the benefit proposed by it?

Shep. If you look on the authors under consideration, as Christians, no dreams, no reveries of a madman, can be more wild or monstrous, than their performances. But if you believe them to have been Deists, the inconsistency you are so much surprised at, will vanish into a stroke of art; and what you took at first for gross folly, will appear to be sheer knavery. If men, as Christians, as the most refined and reasoning Christians, like these ingenious writers, who

[a] See the Moral Philosopher, p. 144.

pare Christianity to the quick, are, after all, in explaining or defending it, forced to run into palpable absurdities and contradictions, and talk like fools on the best hypothesis of revelation; what will follow, but that revelation itself must be an absurdity? This artful piece of folly serves to save appearances with undiscerning and illiterate Christians; and gives those who schemed it an opportunity of sliding into the minds of such readers, and there confounding the fundamental principles of religion with such doubts and perplexities, as it requires more candour and good sense to clear up, than fall to the lot of those who are most apt to entertain themselves with books of this kind. The author of the Moral Philosopher, as I have been told, made the tour of all opinions relating to religion and physic; and, having found little else than prejudice and nonsense every where, threw new light, in great abundance, on both those branches of knowledge. What his skill in correcting the ethics of the learned world was, we expect to find on reading his Moral Philosopher; but upon looking into it, we are surprised to find it contains nothing more than a refutation of all that, which not only the divines, but even the apostles, took for Christianity. This we find dictated with so superior an air of sufficiency and authority, as may well serve, instead of weighty arguments, to convince us, that the author knew a great deal more of our religion, than those who were instructed in it immediately by God himself. As for Mr. Chubb, if ever any man was inspired by himself, it was he; for surely no man ever dictated from the fulness of himself with so high an air of authority, or by so happy a management made his bare assertions pass for convincing arguments.

Temp. My curiosity, to see what an illiterate person could say on a learned controversy, made me one of Mr. Chubb's readers; and, believe me, I did not think him by any means inferior to the other writers on either side of the question, excepting in style and method.

Shep. Did you not find yourself furnished in his writings with an excellent gradation of systems, one leading you still deeper than another into libertinism?

Temp. I did; and observed, that while this chandler of new lights was writing his way to Deism, he retailed to his

readers a large parcel of lucubrations, out of which all sorts and sizes of libertines may furnish themselves with new systems, and spruce opinions, that sit as easy on their consciences, as his gloves did on their hands.[b]

Shep. Notwithstanding the air of an original, which he is very studious of affecting, he borrows largely from others; and in his posthumous works particularly, is so full of the trite reflections, and trivial cavils, often canted up by other Deists, and as often solidly refuted, that nothing can be more ridiculous, than his attempt to palm them on the reader for new discoveries of his own, or for unanswerable objections. It is certain these performances have much the look of Chubb; yet there is so great a conformity between the matter contained in them, and the heads published with the proposals for printing the posthumous volume of 'Christianity as old as the Creation,' that some are of opinion these are the posthumous works of Tindal, and not of Chubb, but so dressed up indeed in Chubb's manner, as to give them the sanction of his more reputable name. Be this as it will, it is no small advantage to them with the gross of their readers, that they seem to be the productions of an illiterate author.

Temp. I must own I think them surprising performances for a man who could only read and write.

Shep. You are not singular in this. If, however, a man, will lay out the greater part of his life in reading and writing on one particular subject, and confine himself to his mother tongue, he cannot choose but gather matter, and acquire a habit of uttering it in as elegant a style as that of Mr. Chubb, although his talents are not of the first rate. Many women, without taking half the pains he did, both think more justly, and deliver themselves in a much better style: but it passes for no wonder in them, because they think it (and no doubt it is) a more rational way of spending their time in knotting, or making a housewife, than in starting difficulties and quirks to puzzle the minds of mankind, or in working up old shreds of libertinism into new deistical books.

Temp. Did not Chubb pass for a sort of Christian during his lifetime?

Shep. He did. It is true, his Christianity was of his

[b] He was first a glover, and then a tallow-chandler.

own making. He approved of no writings in the New Testament. He disliked the Gospels least; yet was so much out of humour even with them, and thought the evangelists either so ignorant of the history they undertook to write, or so dishonest towards a religion they staked their lives on, that he was forced to turn evangelist himself, and publish a new gospel of his own, which, in contradistinction to theirs, he modestly entitles, 'The true Gospel of Jesus Christ.'

Temp. I am not much acquainted with that performance. Pray from what ancient records does he draw the materials of his new gospel, I mean, when he ventures to differ with the old evangelists?

Shep. Although he differs from them almost in every thing; and it should therefore seem that his authorities ought to be very strong; yet he cites no records, relies on no authorities but his own; and only assures us that Christ did not, could not, speak and act as the evangelists take upon them to say he did.

Temp. This is ridiculous.

Shep. Consider, sir, the evangelists, who were men of no great genius, could not so well have known what they saw our Saviour do, or heard him say, as Mr. Chubb did, who, by the force of most astonishing talents, hath found out what Christ ought, or ought not, to have said and done. Hence it is, that he sets us right in our ideas of Christ's person, character, mission, and doctrine. How it should come to pass, that this sacred penman of the Gospel should speak to us, now he is dead, in the strain of a Deist, is not to be accounted for, but by one as eminent for conjectures as himself.

Temp. It is a most difficult matter for him, who peruses these writings, so full are they of opposite drifts, and gross contradictions, to find out what their author would be at, unless it was the glory of being an author, and the profits arising from the retail of his books, on which, and the contributions of his disciples, he lived more comfortably, as the missionary of infidelity, than he could have done, as a trades man, on the income of his two honester callings. My inquiries have already given you so much trouble, that I am almost afraid to ask, whether you have yet seen the book lately prohibited in France, entitled *Les Mœurs.* I must

own I think it a very fine performance; but I know not how to form a clear idea, either of the design its author had in writing it, or of the principles he would instil by it.

Shep. I am surprised you should find the least difficulty in that. Does he not, in his 'Preliminary Discourse on Virtue,' insist that the law or religion of nature are innate, and, if attended to, sufficiently clear and cogent? Does he not, in his introduction, tell us, 'The existence of a Deity is a truth so clear in itself, that a train of argumentations serve only to obscure it; and that the human mind hath as general and as regular an idea of the infinite perfections of God, as it hath of his being?' Does he not also maintain, that the natural law hath been rendered obscure or doubtful only by the passions of men, and the superstitious innovations, introduced from time to time, in all countries?

Temp. If I remember right, he does.

Shep. Nay, he goes farther; for he says, notwithstanding the prevalence of our passions and innovations, all men have right ideas of duty and morality. In order to degrade our Saviour and his apostles from the office of instructing us, he would have us look on ourselves, as sufficiently enlightened by nature, and consequently in no need of religious or moral teachers. After this (who would expect it?) he entertains us with very particular lectures concerning the nature of religion, devotion, and virtue, as if we were wholly ignorant of them all. Do we know our duty to God, ourselves, and mankind, already? Why, then, does he inform us of these things? Is he so self-sufficient as to think nobody ought to preach to us but himself? If the law of nature is obscured or frustrated only by passion and superstition, all he had to do, was to point his wit against those obstructors of truth and goodness. As soon as they are dispersed, the light of nature will shine clearly from within, and render impertinent his, and all other treatises, about manners. This inconsistency and presumption would be the more excusable, were not his moral lectures interspersed here and there with sentiments exceedingly loose, and repugnant to the strictness he every where pretends to, and with such characters and descriptions as tend but the more strongly to soften, to corrupt, and pollute the heart, for their being painted with the utmost delicacy, and enlivened with the finest strokes of imagination. He dedicates his book to

a married lady in a kind of Platonic billet-doux; and in the work itself expatiates on his passion for her in such terms, as cannot but disquiet the mind of her husband, if he knows his wife by the name of Menoqui. This effect it can hardly fail of, notwithstanding the protestations, with which the author, in that passage, flourishes on his virtue; and the rather, because in many others he takes particular delight in dwelling on the intercourse of the sexes, which would be highly criminal, if not authorized by marriage.

Temp. As for marriage, in our sense of the word, he does not approve of it; but would have a man and woman live together, without any vow or ceremony, if they love each other, and part when they cease to do so.

Shep. The more need hath Menoqui's husband to keep both the author and his book, as far from the goddess as he can; for, allowing that we may judge of the former by the latter, no man is qualified to put her virtue to a severer trial, if his person does not carry in it an antidote sufficient to prevent in her the possibility of a weakness towards him. Never did libertinism appear with an aspect so engaging, with a mien so charming, or in a dress so genteel, as this writer hath given it. His words are steeped in honey; his periods polished off with the greatest exactness; his sentiments covered with the most delicate gilding; his reflections, descriptions, characters, seasoned up with wit and elegance, to the most exalted palate; above all, his principles are so sweet and soothing, that they enter into a sensual heart, like an enchantment, and, rising from thence through the imagination, seize the judgment, and captivate the will. He seldom reasons; but his assertions pass on the reader, like those of a beautiful woman on the beholder, for convincing arguments.

Temp. The virtue of Menoqui can't be more endangered by the author, than the principles of other young people by his bewitching book. What a beautiful allegory is that, in which he represents the law of nature as engraved on an island of marble in the heart! The water, he tells us, which surrounds this island, is sometimes so raised by tides and tempests, as to cover the inscription, and prevent its being legible, but never so as to wash it away.

Shep. The similitude is indeed very fine, but more con-

sonant to the author's hypothesis, than to fact and nature. The mind of man comes into being without any characters or inscriptions engraved on it. It is a field covered with a rich soil; but hath not in itself the root or seed of a single plant. In this condition it lies for some time, till discipline or correction breaks it up, and mellows it, and till education sows it with seeds of various kinds; from whence immediately springs a crop of plants, some nutritious and wholesome, some useless or baneful. Reason, the lord of the soil, soon after enters, and is employed in rooting out the one, and watering the other; while, in spite of all he can do, a number of beasts, more or less disposed to fear and obey him, entering by another passage, devour the produce, for the most part the better produce of the field. A few of them indeed submit to his yoke, and are employed in drawing water, or in cultivating anew such parts of the ground, as he hath lately cleared from the weeds and brambles.

Temp. THE smaller libertine writers, such as Coward, Asgill, a few pamphleteers, and those who, in handling other subjects, give religion a blow as they pass, are not worth notice. They are fallen into disuse among the deistical party itself; and are generally of too low a character, both in point of sense and entertainment, to merit an animadversion.[a]

Shep. YOU have already seen, sir, with how much art each deistical writer labours to insinuate his principles, and beat out of his reader's mind the principles of Christianity. If you will believe them, they are under a necessity of using stratagem and cunning for these purposes, to prevent the prosecutions to which an opener conduct might expose them

[a] In this class is to be ranked a bulky pamphlet, published since this dialogue was wrote, and entitled, 'Heaven Open to all Men;' in which the stupidity and profaneness of the author are so equally eminent, that one knows not from which of the two to draw its character. It is mentioned here only to confirm what hath been frequently insisted on in these Dialogues, that, of all writings, none are so eagerly catched at in a dissolute age and country, as those which promise the indulgence of God and happiness to profligates. Nothing can so strongly exemplify that observation, as the great demand for this despicable performance, the artifice of which is so gross, that it may be seen through by a child, the matter so wicked, the manner so clumsy, as not to be relished, but by such as have a taste for garbage. Yet all the refinement of the Characteristics, and all the wit of the Independent Whig, could not give them so quick a passage into the world, as its bare title has procured for the senseless pamphlet mentioned.

in this age of bigotry. A suit at law, or a fine, is too severe a martyrdom for any one to run the hazard of, who sets forth, that all men have already sufficient means of knowing what he proposes to teach them: but if their instructions be of no use to the world, every man being able to teach himself, why do they publish, every day, whole volumes of those instructions? Is it only to gratify their vanity, they become authors? If it is, why do they not choose to write novels and plays, which might entertain the very same class of small readers, whose tastes are as tallies to such writers, and acquire them a more solid reputation, than performances that tell us, almost in every page, they themselves are needless? As authors of this stamp write from the heart, rather than the head, there is no propensity, in that magazine of libertinism, that may not be voided to great advantage in a play or a novel. On the other hand, if they esteem their own writings as highly useful to mankind, why do men, so full of benevolence and love to the species, so transported with the beauty of virtue, particularly of sincerity, suffer the trifling terror of a fine to lay an embargo on the important truths they have discovered, and force them to have recourse to a base dissimulation, which miserably maims and distorts those truths in the very birth? Dark dealings, and pitiful arts, fit only for the basest of men to practise, are, surely, very unbecoming ingredients in the conduct of a hero, whose soul is wholly divested, to use the expression of Lord Shaftsbury, of self-passions, warmed with natural and social affections, and sublimed by perfect raptures of benevolence. But what are the dreadful severities that force these writers to lie, in so infamous a manner, for the truth? I can hardly think the tyranny of a jury capable of frightening these souls of the first magnitude; for not one in ten of them hath been ever prosecuted at law for his book; and such as were, made twice as much by the retail of their contraband wares, as they lost by the prosecution. It is not, therefore, in reality, the dread of prosecution, to which the dissimulation of libertine writers is owing, but to a consciousness that their principles would appear shocking, did they expose them to view without disguise. There is no one thing contributes so much to a right examination of principles, as a due attention to the tendency of those prin-

ciples; because the best arguments, either for or against their truth, are drawn from a clear foresight of their effects. All this advantage is lost to him, on whom any opinion is imposed, under the mask of another, or a contrary opinion: for as he does not yet think it different, in itself, from that which was formerly in possession of his assent, so he looks on its tendency as the same; neither does he perceive, that his opinion is materially changed, till the axioms, on which it is founded, are riveted in his mind: so that when the change begins to be perceived, he is pleased with it, and to such a degree blinded by prepossession, as either not to see, or be delighted with, its tendency. It is thus that Christians are taught infidelity by writers, and upon maxims, that seem, at first, to be purely Christian.

Temp. You hit exactly the artifice practised on me, to wean my raw and unsuspicious mind from Christianity: and, I must say, it had been infinitely a more gentleman-like injury to have picked my pocket, than my mind. The pilferer of principles is the worst sort of thief; for he not only filches the most valuable of all our possessions, the very seeds of religion and virtue, but, what is still a greater injury, leaves, in the place of them, his own notions, the seeds of infidelity and wickedness. He comes in the night, when we are asleep; and, having stripped the house of all that is useful or ornamental, he sets it on fire over our heads, and then escapes unseen under the additional coverture of the smoke.

Shep. The scandalous artifice of sowing infidelity in the garb of Christians, is, however, but one out of a thousand, practised by the same disingenuous set of men, and for the same detestable purpose. Matters, wholly foreign to the controversy about Christianity, are lugged into it by these pretended enemies to prejudice, in order to blind and bias the minds of silly people, and to make up for the want of solid arguments arising from the nature of the dispute itself. Christianity must be an imposture, because bad men are thrust by worse into the ministry; although, at the same time, the labours and virtues of a good clergyman are not allowed to reflect the least honour on the religion he preaches, nor at all to vouch for its truth and usefulness; neither are the horrible vices of our libertine preachers ascribed, in the least, to their principles, notwithstanding the manifest ten-

dency of those principles to vice, and the open panegyrics published by some among them, directly recommending vice itself. The maintenance of the clergy, which, in nine parishes out of ten throughout England and Wales, is rather a proper support for a mechanic, than for a man of education, is turned into a popular argument against Christianity. The clergy are said to preach religion, not in regard to its truth, or the good of mankind, but for their own interest; while no one sees that those who press this argument as an objection to our religion, must, if religion is laid aside, take the maintenance of the clergy to themselves. It is pure selfishness in us, to retain our pittance; yet those who would take it from us, are not so much as suspected of any view to their own interest in propagating infidelity, which cannot generally take place, without giving to infidels all that magnified wealth, enjoyed, at present, by the clergy. Jokes and sneers are also called in to support a bad cause, and to render light and ridiculous the ideas of religion, which otherwise, and in themselves, are solemn and awful. For this purpose, the honourable writer, whom we have had occasion to mention so often, hath given us a long and elaborate treatise on buffoonery, and the use of it thus applied. It was not enough for him, like a mere theorist, to delineate and recommend this new controversial engine; he hath descended from the state and dignity of a lord, and played it off himself with all the skill and address that could be expected from both a professor and a practitioner. And is Christianity an imposture, because its grave and solemn ideas may be assembled in the brain of a libertine buffoon with such low and ridiculous notions as are apt to shoot up in a mind of that turn? The gravest subjects are the most liable to ridicule, nothing being more easy and practicable by the greatest blockhead, than to tack together an absurd and solemn idea, in which consists the essence of burlesque. The oddity and boldness of a profane jest gives it the advantage of surprise, by which the laugh is obtained before it is at all considered, whether there is any sense at the bottom of it, or not; and if it is tinctured, although ever so slighty, with real humour, it passes, with the senseless, for an unanswerable argument against religion. It was thus that Aristophanes attempted, in his 'Comedy of the Clouds,' to baffle

the philosophy of Socrates, which he knew he could not refute. Although this weapon is used by libertines with no small degree of haughtiness and cruelty, against their adversaries; yet they have the assurance to claim the benefit, and exercise the force, of another, not in the least consistent with it. Of all the Christian graces, charity is set forth to us as the chief; and, no doubt, comprehends in it a tenderness for such as differ from us in opinion or principle. As libertinism is yet only in its growth, it stands in need of toleration and indulgence to mature it; and therefore they who labour to push it forward in the world, do all they can to shelter it under the wing of Christian charity, that, while it lies there protected, it may have an opportunity to stab Christianity itself to the heart. With this view, our libertines, of all degrees and distinctions, call aloud on Christians for charity, which, among themselves, and the polite world, they dignify with the more fashionable names of benevolence and social affection. This amiable virtue they rightly represent as the patroness of free inquiry and truth, to distinguish it from zeal, the mother, if you will believe them, of ignorance, superstition, and persecution.

Temp. I know not whether they are more beholding to any other art than this, for the prodigious progress they have made: it serves them for a surtout to all the rest: and although it is pleaded for chiefly as an introduction to truth; yet it is made a covering for such disingenuity as was never before employed in her service.

Shep. Nor, indeed, ever can be: but if charity and zeal are so diametrically opposed to each other, that the first cannot be a virtue, unless the last is a vice, how can charity serve the cause of truth, if it is carried so far as to divest us of all zeal and attachment to truth? Or is zeal to be extinguished in the breasts of Christians only, while they yet look on their principles as great and necessary truths, and while the opposers of these principles are allowed to be as warm as all their passions can make them, in their attacks on Christianity? If I, as a Christian, cannot help taking these men to be enemies to my religion, am I not, in that case, bound to detect their artifices, to give warning of the poison they would infuse, and to oppose them to the uttermost of my power? Charity itself ought to inspire me

with zeal in such a service; for how, otherwise, can I pretend to say I love God, if I desert what I take to be religion? Or man, if I suffer him to be corrupted, when I have it in my power to prevent it? Surely I have, at least, as good a right openly to oppose that which I believe to be a dangerous error, as any man can have covertly to defend or insinuate it. It is certain, charity is not confined to its proper office, nor applied to its own genuine purpose, when it renders us cool and indifferent to the truth and purity of religion, or teaches us to think it a matter of no consequence, what we ourselves or others, whom it is our duty to instruct, shall adopt for religion. If we are to compare extremes, I know not any excess of zeal more prejudicial to mankind, than this stupid atheistical indifference.

Temp. But is not zeal, when once it gets footing in the mind, extremely apt to degenerate into a fierce and persecuting spirit?

Shep. Just as apt as any other species of warmth is to run out into extremes; but as soon as it discovers this tendency, charity is to soften, and knowledge to set bounds to it: for one may love God and religion, without hating those who shew the same love another way, or even those who do neither. Nay, the love of God is the best preparative to the love of man, who, howsoever unamiable he may chance to be in himself, is, notwithstanding, the work of God, and our fellow-creature. I never thought it matter of wonder, that our libertines should put on so great a shew of temper, benevolence, and indulgence for the principles of others; having observed their own opinions to hang so loose about them. The zeal they are actuated by, is not exerted so much to enliven their own principles, as it is to deaden the principles of such as still adhere to revelation, and to make them ashamed of their attachment to it. For this latter purpose, they have employed so much common place and ridicule, and their younger brethren in the church have so effectually assisted them herein, that the spirit of Christianity is become, by their means, a thing perfectly ungenteel, and not to be tolerated above the vulgar. It is a flame that rises towards heaven, indeed; but cools and contracts, the higher it goes among men, till it ends in smoke at the upper end of life. Among the foreign aids of

libertinism, we may justly reckon the bulk of such quotations as the deistical authors borrow from the writings of divines, whose ill judged defences of religion, founded not on the spirit and genius of religion itself, but on occasional systems of their own, are by no means to be charged to its account. If the libertine would overturn Christianity, let him refute the Bible itself, which is by no means answerable for the refinements of Cumberland, Tillotson, Scot, Clarke, &c. These were among the foremost of mankind in understanding; yet still they were but men; and as such (I speak it with all imaginable deference) were weak enough to run up their apologetical systems to extremes; drawing all their forces to oppose the assault made on one side of the garrison, while they were inattentive to the sap on the other: for, as we have already observed, religion hath been attacked, on all sides, with arts and arguments, not more opposite to Christianity, than inconsistent with one another. Our libertines propose to themselves a very cunning end, by affecting obscurity in their writings. If the divines had not answered them, they must have kept the field, and made a triumph; yet they could not be answered without detecting their principles: so that their adversaries became their commentators, and explained those principles to the world, which their authors had wrapped up in doubtful and ambiguous expressions, and which, had it not been for the necessity of exposing their pernicious nature, it would have been wisdom to have left involved in a darkness, that became them much better than light. There are poisons too volatile to be safely thrown into the streets, or trod upon. Among all the arts used by libertines, there is not one of so much service to them, as the promise of unbounded liberty, which comes foremost in their endeavours to make proselytes. Vanity is impatient of that authority, self-sufficiency of that instruction, and vice of that restraint, which religion brings along with it. To these, a licence to think and act at large, is proposed, while reason is amused with specious arguments, the tendency of which is too sweet to a haughty or a sensual mind to be resisted. Nay, this licentiousness is recommended to those who have still some tincture of religion, under the name of Christian liberty; for in such men Christianity may be best undermined by the gospel, and revelation refuted by Scripture.

Temp. The teachers of libertinism act, in this, like those besiegers who will not capitulate with the governor, but in the hearing of the townsmen, to whom they make their proposals as agreeable as they can, in hopes, by that stratagem, to excite a sedition, that may end in a surrendry. Pursuant to this artifice, they generally make their attacks upon the young and giddy, whose passions are strong, whose conceit is high, and whose reason is not yet arrived at maturity.

Shep. Hence it comes, that, when libertinism gets footing in a seminary of learning, it fails not to make a prodigious progress, and to produce a shoal of pert pedantic disputants, who know human nature perfectly well, before they have had any intercourse with mankind; who can decide all the controversies about religion, without having learned a tittle of them; whose understandings, in short, although as yet in the cradle of knowledge, have all on a sudden discovered, what all the sages of former times were strangers to, that every individual man, who preached up religion to the world, was a knave; and every mortal who believed in it, was a fool. This discovery, however, only serves for shew; but they have made another of singular use, namely, that whatsoever their own hearts dictate, in respect to a bottle, a mistress, or any thing else, they have an unquestionable right to execute. All that a whimsical or artful head could invent, all that a dissolute heart could suggest, hath been played off against Christianity in these latter times; no stratagem hath been left untried, no artifice that could impose on the silly, no bait that could catch the men of pleasure, no indulgence that could tempt the licentious, no scoffs nor calumnies that could expose the defenders of religion, no charm that could stupify the thoughtful, and no sophistry that could bewilder the inquirer after truth, hath been neglected. As one of the grand advantages of libertinism arises from novelty, so a world of industry hath been used, by its teachers, to preserve an appearance of it. A libertine book, or system, hath no sooner been solidly refuted or antiquated, than they have supplied its place with another, that served as well to feed the herd of Epicurus with filth of a new relish. One of these dies away, and becomes as stale as the Bible; but, before its gloss is quite worn off, another more suitable to the times is provided. They pass

like clouds, darkening this or that principle of Christianity, till they are puffed away by some new wind of doctrine. Shameful cause! that stands in so much need of craft to support it, and, not daring to shew its face, is forced not only to wear a mask, but to change it almost every day, lest it should be known for the same detestable fiend, already detected as the author of infinite mischief. To feed their disciples with a sufficient change of new varieties, they sometimes invent new religions, which serve almost as well to hurt the true one, as turning the coat of Deism. About twenty years ago, Mr. Puppy, who is a most sufficient gentleman, and an Atheist, was greatly admired, at least by himself, for a new kind of pick-tooth of his own invention, which he wittily called his chaplain, because it took his meat from between his teeth; this extraordinary success having discovered to him the force of his own genius, he afterward invented a new religion, which had somewhat in it extremely parallel to his pick-tooth; for it was wholly calculated to remove the remaining scruples of such as have not yet arrived at perfect Atheism. This he preached up with a bottle in his hand, and got six disciples. Puppy's turn of mind in this invention, is so common, that it enters into all the modernised books wrote on religious subjects, which the authors, not knowing how otherwise to render curious, fashionable, and vendible, stuff with new-invented anodynes, that never fail to be swallowed with a most ridiculous greediness. Such, sir, are the teachers of libertinism, and such their arts, by which, as if truth and falsehood, good and evil, had changed their clothes, the dispute about religion is turned into a mere masquerade of opinions.

Temp. It was not, indeed, by such teachers, nor after such a manner, that Christianity was introduced into the world. To a sensible and ingenuous mind the different methods of recommending and propagating the true religion on the one side, and of insinuating infidelity on the other, are alone sufficient to determine its choice in favour of the former.

Shep. Nothing can be more true, as will appear upon a short comparison. The unaffected simplicity and purity of the gospel style, the calmness and force with which the most

sublime and surprising precepts, the most important and alarming events, the strongest reasonings, and the most beautiful allusions, are delivered in the writings of the New Testament, shew plainly, that it was dictated by him who can thunder through a serene sky, and not by man, who, as the excellent Mr. West observes, could not, on subjects so apt to engage the heart, and fire the imagination, have abstained, if left to himself, from ecstasies and transports, nor from the highest decorations a rhetorical or poetical invention could have suggested. God manifested in the flesh, laid in a manger, educated by illiterate parents, and yet uttering such things as never man spoke; instructing men in more than human wisdom, and to more than human goodness; revealing the most stupendous mysteries; commanding the winds and storms, conquering diseases, death, devils; yet submitting to all sorts of indignities with patience; doing good, and receiving evil without the usual discomposure of an injured person in the one, or the least air of a benefactor in the other; spit upon, buffeted, ridiculed, with the silence and resignation of a lamb; sweating blood, agonizing in perfect health, replying to bitter taunts with tender and compassionate prayers, and at last, although the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dying the death of a slave! What mere human historian could preserve a temper in writing of such things? And yet they are delivered without the least transport or embellishment; as if he who wrote them had been used to see or do the like; and indeed he was; for it was God. Yet calm, cool, and sedate, as the style of the New Testament is, it abounds with such instances of the true sublime, as are sufficient to render perfectly despicable, on a comparison, the most exalted flights of Homer, Virgil, and Milton; on a comparison, give me leave to say, between those flights in their original dress, the most advantageous that human genius could give them, and the scriptural passages in a literal and bald translation. The Scriptures, intended for translation into all languages, place all their grandeur, force, and pathos, wholly in the sentiment, and borrow nothing from the diction but simple expression. With what raptures would a judicious critic be transported, should he see, in a heathen poet, such strokes of the calm and concise sublime, as these! 'He rebuked the winds and

the sea, and there was a great calm: I will, be thou healed; and he became whole: Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do: Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword; his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength, and his voice as the sound of many waters: I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them.' What is the silent sublime of Ajax and Dido, if compared to that of our blessed Saviour, when, on the crowing of the cock, he turned and looked at Peter? So much for the style of the gospel. As for the behaviour of those who preached it, nothing could discover an equal degree of truth and dignity. It was, like their style, great in the midst of simplicity, majestic in the midst of modesty and submission. The light that shone both from their words and actions, was as the sun in his strength, illustrious, uniform, and reviving. On the other hand, the apostles of libertinism are full of noise and sputter; and their style pompous on groveling subjects, and low on the sublime; ridiculous on serious, disingenuous on religious, and obscure on familiar topics, with a world of conceit and affectation. As to their conduct in propagating infidelity, it is made up of lies, chicane, and hypocrisy, employed in tutoring their readers to dishonesty, lewdness, and pollutions more than brutal, in the midst of shameless professions of sincerity and piety. Their performances play, at first, like a lambent flame about the heart, which they soon kindle into a volcano, wherein every combustible passion is set on fire, and every virtue consumed. Christianity, sir, owes its propagation to miracles; infidelity, to a love of vice: Christianity was preached to the world in simplicity; infidelity, in false eloquence and buffoonery: Christianity was vouched for by the martyrdom of its preachers; infidelity, by the gross chicane and dissimulation of its authors: Christianity came from God, who sent it into the world through the very best of men; infidelity came from the devil, who propagates it among unhappy mortals, predisposed to wickedness, by instruments exactly resembling himself.

Temp. Were there not men who are already fools by mere defect of understanding, and want to be villains on principle, the teachers of libertinism could never make a sin-

gle disciple: no kind of author can insult his readers so grossly as he who treats them like fools and blockheads. All cunning writers do this; but, having, for the most part, silly people to deal with, there is no offence taken: and others, who have more sense, shut their eyes and swallow, because the potion is luscious. Had they not a most vehement thirst for it, the shocking conduct of those who administer it could not fail to prove it poison: for what else can come from such infamous dissemblers? The very men who, in their writings, affect such an air of piety, fill their conversation with blasphemy: they talk sometimes in a high strain about virtue, yet stick at no kind nor degree of wickedness, no enormity. In order to qualify for a place under the crown, they will receive the sacrament between two horrible debauches, in which more sorts of crimes than one are committed; although, by conforming to that holy ordinance, they declare, as strongly as actions can do, that they worship Christ as their God and Saviour, whom all the world knows, they believe to have been a mere impostor. This, however, gives no disgust nor alarm to their disciples, who, of all men, are the most stupidly, and the most slavishly blinded, by a high opinion of their leaders. People of little understanding are extremely apt to hold, in a strange degree of admiration, the capacities and persons of men, who are much above them in knowledge; and this, as I have found by myself, is the source of infinite mischief. I knew the writers, on both sides of the controversy about Christianity, were greatly superior to me in understanding; and as I had, therefore, no rule to measure altitudes, in my opinion, so much transcending my own, I imagined the libertine apostles overtopped the Christian, for no other reason, perhaps, but because their style is more pompous, their matter more uncommon and surprising, and because they always assert with confidence, and censure with contempt. Like precipices, that shew all their elevation at once, they seemed more lofty than they really were; while the Christian writers, either rising more gradually, or being set at a greater distance, lost, in my estimation, one half of their height. I was guided by Gibson and Conybeare to the top of a mountain, without perceiving myself considerably raised above the plain; Shaftsbury and Tindal transported me suddenly,

and, as it were, by magic art, to the brow of a precipice, which, although not higher than an ordinary hill, turned my head, and made it giddy. The conceit of younger libertines is, I assure you, far from preventing in them a most slavish admiration of those who lead the way to infidelity; nor can all their airy notions of thinking freely, and for themselves, arm them against swallowing by the lump, with a most implicit resignation, such doctrines of their libertine teachers, as ten thousand miracles could not reconcile them to, did those doctrines make a part of revelation.

Shep. THERE are few men, who have leisure, inclination, and capacity, to make a competent search into the abstruse controversies about the nature of man, upon which others, equally difficult, about morality and religion, have been founded. In these no safe determination can be expected, without such intense thinking, and such a stock of learning, as fall to the lot of only one among a thousand: yet the rest, who have narrow talents, and little knowledge, must have their opinions about these matters, and must set up for as high assurance in those opinions, as the few, to whom nature and education have been kinder.

Temp. If it requires so great a degree of capacity and learning, to determine the controversy about Christianity, either that controversy may be decided by something else than reason and study, or the ignorant part of mankind cannot be Christians on a rational footing: from whence it will follow, that it must be every whit as hard to reason one's self into Christianity, as out of it.

Shep. This, indeed, would follow, if there were no other way of satisfying our reason about the merits of this dispute, but by a learned disquisition. This is not really the case; for there is a short method, by which the illiterate may be safely determined whether the Christian religion ought to be adhered to, or not; and a longer for the learned. As to the first, the ignorant can easily proceed thus with himself: 'Can I be happy in myself, or do my duty to the community, without living an innocent and virtuous life? Will my natural ignorance and corruption suffer me to lead such a life, without the instructions and sanctions of revealed religion? Of all the religions in the world, that pre-

tend to come from God, is there any, that so fully comes up to all my wants, that carries with it such an appearance of truth and power, as the Christian?' In contrast to this, there is another short method, used by a mind disposed to libertinism: 'Why were appetites given me, if I am not to indulge them: since neither the Christian, nor any other religion established in the world, will grant me a licence to indulge those appetites at my own discretion, have I not a right to reject all those religions, and make it my only religion to live according to my nature?' As to those who will pursue the longer method of inquiry about religion through the wide ocean of learning and controversy, they ought first to consider whether they are provided with a rudder, sails, and ballast, for such a voyage. Although a strong natural judgment is, in the first place, absolutely necessary to such an inquiry; yet, without abundance of learning, it will be of no use. He who knows little, let his talents be what they will, hath neither sufficient materials to work on, nor sufficient instruments to work with; and must therefore employ those he hath to ends and purposes quite foreign to their natural aptitudes and powers. Like a tradesman, who hath but two or three tools, and therefore must saw with a hatchet, and bore with a chissel; the illiterate or half-learned controvertist is forced with a little modern philosophy, and a scanty stock of reading, scarcely extending farther than his mother-tongue can carry him, to beat his way through controversies impossible to be learnedly settled without a great skill in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and antiquities. If he is a Buckinger, mere necessity may turn his stumps into a sort of hands, with which he may perform feats to be wondered at, not because they exceed the performances of other men, but because they are done under so great disadvantages. Notwithstanding this, it is a point much laboured at by our present libertines, of all degrees, to decry learning, study, and antiquity; and to recommend nature as the best instructor, and guide. This they do, because learning and antiquity are against their principles; and nature, by which they mean human nature, in its present degenerate condition, favours those principles, as much as they again patronise their vicious pleasures. Nature in man, as well as other animals, if destitute of culture, quickly

grows wild and savage. If we are to make no advantage of history or antiquity, why do Perault, and sir Thomas Pope Blount, call the present times the ancient? It is true, the world, like a man, may grow wiser, as it grows older; but, surely, this it cannot do by decrying, and laying aside the knowledge of antiquity, on which, alone, all new improvements must be built. This witty reflection, therefore, made use of by the writers mentioned, to vilify ancient learning, contradicts and subverts itself; for, in respect to knowledge, a man can be called old, in the latter part of his life, only from the memory he retains of his past experiences and acquisitions. When the man of seventy hath lost his memory, he is again a child; and the world, in like manner, must return to ignorance and barbarism, if it neglects to enrich itself with the treasures of antiquity. Such, however, is the humour of the present times, that they will pretend to philosophy, and even learning, who never read above ten years backward, and who prefer the last novel or newspaper, to Herodotus and Livy. All this is done in order to strike at the Bible, from whence we draw, and by which we prove, our religion: for the same reason, the writings of the fathers, those outworks to the sacred volumes, are cried down, and laid aside, and their excellent authors ridiculed, by the name of greybeards, and old women. Behold the judgment of God on such a conduct! These despisers of antiquity are carrying the present age with them headlong into ignorance and barbarism, insomuch that even infidelity will, in a little time, have nothing else to found itself on but the former, nor to defend itself with, but the latter. Our country, so famous, in the last century, for its Boyles, Newtons, Addisons, &c. hath at present, few rising geniuses to boast of in any of the arts and sciences. Who is there to follow Cave, Sanderson, Bull, Barrow, Tillotson, and the few eminent divines, still living, whom we borrow from the last century? Who, to take the place of Newton and Halley in mathetics and natural philosophy? Who, to succeed Dryden, Congreve, Pope, or Swift, in wit and poetry.

Temp. I take your observation, which is but too just, to be an omen of approaching barbarism. What can men expect, in any species of production, from nature unimproved, or reason uninstructed? The same thing happens

in all human performances; for instance, in dramatic poetry, as well as theology; if a man follows, in either, the dictates of his own fancy, without rules or culture, he must fail of truth in the one, and of excellence in the other. It is true, he that thinks or writes in this manner, conforms to his own particular nature, or perhaps the passions and taste of men less refined than himself: but he follows not true or general nature, no more than he does right reason. For this I may appeal, in respect to dramatic poety, to Aristotle, Horace, Cervantes, Dacier, and the duke of Buckingham, in Gildon's 'Essay on the Art and Rise of the Stage;' nay, and to lord Shaftsbury himself. Now it is, I think, not a little strange, that even deistical critics, such as lord Shaftsbury and Gildon, who own that the greatest geniuses can do almost nothing, without learning and culture, as to other kinds of production, wherein fancy predominates, and reason acts only a secondary part, should, in respect to the production of religious knowledge, insist, that a man of the meanest capacity, although utterly uninstructed, may easily strike out a perfect system, and, when he hath done, defend it with sufficient reasons. There are some, who, presuming on the truth of this extraordinary opinion, boldly enter the lists of religious controversy, without any fund of reading or knowledge. Others, however, whom I could name, do read; but it is in a way the most whimsical you can imagine: they run over a book with all imaginable haste and impatience, tipping the Italics as they go along, to pick out a general notion of the author's subject and matter, in order to flourish with it in conversation among beaux and ladies: this they call skimming. If a solid and learned performance were milk, they might, by this method, get the cream; but such performances being strong liquors, fermented in the head of a great genius, the skimmer gets nothing but the scum and froth. But he seldom deals in any thing else than modern trifles, penned by authors who are as great skimmers in writing, as he is in reading; so that he rarely gets any thing more, than that lighter kind of froth which rides on the very surface. There are, however, different degrees of skimmers: first, he who goes no farther than the title-page, as Librarius, famous for his collection of gilded books; secondly, he who proceeds to the contents

and index, as Micarius, the common-place declaimer; and, lastly, he who runs over the better part of a book, dipping here and there into the two or three first lines of a paragraph, and, like the king's fisher, now and then picking out a small morsel for retail.

Shep. Your account of the skimmers, who are a species of readers I never heard of before, is very entertaining.

If I remember rightly, I think you said, in speaking of yourself, when a Deist, that your libertine principles had a bad effect on your morals.

Temp. The beauty of virtue, and the deformity of vice, were then all the moral principles I had: others may speak for themselves; but, for my own part, I confess, the beauty even of a bad woman generally made a greater impression on me, than the beauty of virtue; and, as to the deformity of vice, I can only say, that I had by no means so great a distaste to drunkenness, as to temperance. This, perhaps, was owing to my not abstracting and subliming my principles as high as lord Shaftsbury did; but this I must say, that not a soul of my deistical acquaintances was a whit more refined in his morals than myself; nay, most of them were so grossly wicked, that their vices could not be even reproved, without indecency.

Shep. If a real Christian can be an ill liver, his religion, I am sure, is not to be blamed for it; and if a Deist should lead a better life than a Christian, trace the wonder to what cause you will, most certainly his principles are not to be thanked for it; these principles laying him under no ties, which every Christian is not subject to, and taking off others of the greatest strength. Virtue is a thing of such importance, that it cannot be founded on too firm a basis. In the Christian religion it is built on the love of ourselves, which, say what we will, is the strongest of all our natural propensities and instincts? whereas, in Deism, it rests on the internal sense of moral beauty and deformity alone, which, as Christians are men, must be found in them, as well as in Deists. Besides, the self-sufficient Deist is his own judge, and may be as indulgent to himself as he pleases; for, in case of guilt, he hath a thousand amusements to blunt the feeble stings of the moral sense, and can

reward his well-doing with unlimited applauses; but the Christian hath God for his judge, and conscience for his witness; whose admonitions, although ever so severe, he is not at liberty to stifle, but, on the contrary, is obliged to enliven them with the most intense and continual reflections, and to attend to them with all possible patience and submission. This comparison gives us Christians no small cause to be uneasy at living among men, whose hands are at liberty for the perpetration of any villainy, while ours are tied up by our religion, from even a defensive resentment. I know most men recommend restraints to others, but keep themselves as free as they can. If, however, we all have reason to fear one another in some degree, which experience tells me is the case; it is necessary we should all, in proportion, be bound over to our good behaviour by better security than merely that of the moral sense. An intellectual Narcissus, like lord Shaftsbury, may be deeply smitten with the beauties of his own mind, reflected from the mirror of his own conceit; but, notwithstanding this, the rest of mankind may have so much reason to think otherwise of him, as to let him live and die without any other admirers than those, whose whimsical understandings are disposed to dwindle into the mere echoes of his opinions. The present times are, no doubt, very happy under the influence of the new principles, which have planted so much 'benevolence and love of the species' among us, that a woman cannot refuse to propagate it with other men, as well as her husband. Friendship, too, runs so high upon the new benevolent system, that a man will hardly hesitate to lie, perjure, or murder, for his friend. Every man begins to know the right use and true value of laws and society; and sells them accordingly. Loose principles are retained only as panders to loose desires, and serve as well as confessors, who turn pimps to those that maintain them.

They who have any real regard for the political welfare of their country, be they ever so indifferent about religion, should consider a little to what a catastrophe the reigning principles of the times are guiding this unhappy nation: so much of our libertine notions as is old, hath been already suspected by philosophers; distrusted, as insufficient, or

pernicious, to the ends of society, by legislators; and condemned, as chimerical, by the experience of all ages and nations. So much of it as is new, is either untried, or found, on trial, to be destructive; and therefore is not to be trusted. The French libertines, generally speaking, don't wish for the abolition even of Popery; because, being very national, they don't wish for the ruin of their country, having no other social basis to lay but religion, nor influence to introduce any other religion, than the one established. Directly opposite to theirs is our conduct, as well of those who retain a faint sense of religion, as of those who have none. We are untying, or rather cutting asunder, the great band of society, and setting the constitution adrift: we are throwing down conscience, the only basis of patriotism and public spirit, and thereby making way for factions, for unfaithful services, and through them, at length, for slavery to foreign powers, as well political as ecclesiastical. Who is he that is blind enough not to see the effect? And who so disingenious, as not to confess the cause? Every one cries out for liberty; yet every one is doing his utmost to make himself, or his son, a slave: for such is the nature of things, and such the irresistible course of Providence, that an infidel and dissolute people can never be free. Men who are religious and good, may be trusted, not only with freedom, but with such a degree of power, as they have sufficient capacities to employ; but, being once become irreligious and wicked, they immediately grow lawless, and utterly unfit to govern themselves, or others. It is a flat political contradiction to itself, and to universal experience, to say, that freedom and infidelity can ever be found together in one and the same people: as soon as faith is banished from among men, they tend naturally and swiftly to a state of absolute slavery; for they are ever ready to sell and betray themselves, having no government of their appetites and pleasures, nor any interest, but the present, which they always endeavour to make the most of. Such men, being altogether unfit for freedom, which would but let them loose, like beasts of prey, upon one another, do, by a happy tendency of nature, or a just curse on infidelity, forge chains for themselves. As every disease in the natural body tends, of itself, to its own cure; a plethora through a nausea to

emptiness, and a cold through a fever to health; in the political body likewise, God hath so constituted our nature, that, when men become wicked, they unavoidably lose the government of themselves, both individually and politically; generally giving up so much of their freedom, as they have already lost of their virtue, till they come to be governed, like beasts, by fear and compulsion only. He who cannot, in any measure, govern himself, as a madman, must be wholly restrained and confined. Nature never overleaps the bounds prescribed to it by religion, without falling immediately into that which it would avoid. The professed man of pleasure always leads the most unpleasant life. The libertine is he, of all men, who is the greatest stranger to liberty. How oddly do men hasten to be slaves, through an unbounded latitude of principle, and a wild licentiousness of practice! The greatest evil attending this progress towards slavery is, that, in proportion as men become more dissolute, and less fit for power, or even freedom; so they become continually more enamoured of both. Hence it is that our libertines, looking on the happy freedom of our constitution as nothing, shew, on all occasions, a rank tincture of republican principles: but as in religious, so in political matters, they discover an extreme and pitiable folly; for they speak in terms most extravagantly panegyrical of the usurper Cromwell, toast his memory, and wish for such another. A greater instance of absurdity than this, cannot be conceived, if we only consider, that Cromwell turned the republic, already formed by his party, into an absolute tyranny, by means of his interest in the army: but if we look a little farther, and consider our libertines as men of profligate lives, and desperate fortunes; we shall discover a little more sense than we expected in their desiring another Cromwell, to lead them through innovation, oppression, and murder, to the pillage of three kingdoms; and to recal those infernal scenes of distraction and desolation, when subjects sat in judgment on their king, when ignorant enthusiasts and hypocrites stood in the pulpits, from whence they had driven a pious and learned clergy; when, in a word, both the constitution and the church were, like St. Peter, crucified with their heads downward. If a rampant spirit of infidelity had not burst the very bands of nature, and divested men of all concern for

the fortunes and liberties of their own posterity, they could not be so blind to the approaching ruin of their country; which cannot be far distant, if an horrible corruption both of principles and manners, if an almost universal venality of every thing sacred and profane, or if the curse of an insulted God, are sufficient to effect it.

Temp. I protest you frighten me. When I compare what you say, on this subject, with the prodigious growth of irreligion among the great ones; I cannot help trembling for the fate of England. What can the Deists have in view, by aiming at the very vitals of their country? I know, full well, they as little expect the rewards, as fear the punishments of futurity; it cannot therefore, be with an eye to such matters, that they labour in the cause of infidelity. But supposing them ever so well satisfied of the truth and usefulness of their principles, they could hope for no reward, after propogating them by arts fit only for the service of a master who delights in untruth and dissimulation. But sure I am, their zeal does not proceed from a warm attachment to their principles, any farther than as they serve their own present purposes. They are all sceptics, and lay, in reality, no sort of stress on those opinions they take so much pains to spread. If they kept their latitudinarian notions to themselves, and left others to the ties of religion, might they not draw their advantages from thence? This considered, their labouring to make proselytes is nothing else than a preposterous industry to multiply rivals for those profits and pleasures to which their principles open them a free passage. They do not thus invite others to share their mistresses with them.

Shep. You have touched a subject, sir, that hath exercised my wonder, as well as yours, and seems to lie concealed in mysteries too abstruse for my penetration. The pride of leading the way in new opinions; the uneasiness arising from a want of numbers to countenance a set of notions, the truth of which their own authors are by no means satisfied about; the economy of making their vicious principles cater for themselves by the money arising from the sale of their books; may, indeed, stir up men to dispute and harangue for libertinism, and now-and-then prompt them

with the substance of a deistical book. But these motives are not sufficient to account for their uniting in clubs; for their assigning to each member the subject his particular talent best qualifies him to handle; for their joining to grub up the materials that are to rig out the next performance; for their sending missionaries, sometimes at a considerable expense, to distant places; or for their uniformly persevering, during more than a century, in a work that must seem so burdensome to men of ease and pleasure, so contrary to their consciences, if they have any, and so destructive to their country, if men so loose and disengaged can be said to have a country.

Temp. The whole affair is, indeed, very astonishing: they are men of too much sense and design, to toil, in this manner, for no purpose, and yet, as in the means we can discover nothing but art and cunning; so, in the end, we can perceive nothing but folly.

Shep. Folly, levity, novelty, might produce such an effect in one or two, and for a short time; but such causes are not apt to be so constant, uniform, and active, in their operations: neither are they able to scheme so deep, to choose out such artful instruments and means, to extend their views to such a distance; nor through so long a tract of time, to pursue their designs with an address and steadiness, not always employed to promote the most interesting ends. For these reasons, and some others, I have been often tempted to believe, that Popery is either the natural parent, or, at least, the fosterer, of libertinism.

Temp. Bless us! do you think the Papists, who rigidly adhere to their own principles, and so vehemently labour to suppress all freedom of thought, could either broach or propagate a set of notions so directly contrary to their own, and so licentious in themselves? I remember you sometimes insinuated this as your opinion, in the debates with Mr. Dechaine; but I imagined you only did it to shew him the inconsistency of his arguments with his own principles.

Shep. You mistook me a little: I really am not sure the gentleman is no Papist. If the members of the Romish church are true to their own tenets, they look upon us, as Protestants and heretics, to be all damned already. They cannot, therefore, put us in a worse condition, nor set us in

a greater opposition to themselves, than, in their opinion, the Reformation itself must do. When it serves their purposes, and they have it in their power to persecute us, they make no scruple of condemning our bodies to temporary, and our souls to eternal flames. Such men cannot be supposed to make a conscience of any thing they do to us, unless it is of this, that they may reproach themselves with a crime, if at any time they have neglected to confound our principles, or to take away our lives. With them it must be a thing rather meritorious than criminal, to turn us all into Deists or Atheists.

Temp. But surely if we were either, we should be still farther removed from a possibility of returning to Popery.

Shep. By no means. The extremes of Atheism and superstition fly off from each other with such a repulsion, but in such a circle, as is very apt to bring them together again on the opposite side. He who hath no religion, is much more likely to become a convert to any particular religion, than he who is attached to an opposite one. The Papists know too well, that as soon as libertinism shall have ruined these nations, it will be easy to reduce them to Popery by the assistance of Popish princes, and of a Popish pretender to the throne.

Temp. Could they hope, think you, that a libertine nation would tamely submit to the yoke of superstition, and spiritual tyranny?

Shep. Consider, sir, that such a people could neither stick together, nor stand by one another, against any encroachment: besides, as all they desire is, to render the men of figure and power indifferent to all religion, if they can once get this effected, they may reasonably hope to do what they please with the common people.

Temp. But our men of fortune, although you suppose them perfectly indifferent to religion, will not suffer Popery to take place, which can never happen without a vast defalcation of their wealth.

Shep. A few leading men, of no principles, may be well enough supposed to find their own private account in favouring such a design; which if they should, they will find means to bring in a majority of the rest. This happens experimentally in every corrupt country, where the wealth

of the whole community is always in the disposal of a few.

Temp. What you say hath some colour of reason; but by what instruments could the pope carry on such a design? His emissaries, the Jesuits, are foreigners; and either cannot speak our language, or do it with so distinguishable an accent, that, were they to preach Deism among us, their drift in so doing, could not be concealed.

Shep. Have we not numbers of Papists here at home, whose children may be bred up in France, or even here, by the Jesuits that lurk among us, to a thorough system of pious frauds? One of these candidates for dissimulation may be easily taught to wear, with a natural grace, the mask of an enthusiast, a libertine, a Deist, an Atheist, or any thing else that may serve the turn. Some of our leading Deists, as Tindal and Toland, had an opportunity of passing through a course of education, like this. Pilloniere, who propagated Deism in this kingdom, was bred a Jesuit, and found admittance here on the strength of a pretended quarrel with the rest of his order. Collins, when he was in France and Holland, held a most intimate intercourse with the Jesuits, and, after he returned to England, a constant correspondence. Of this gentleman I must observe to you, that he argues on all occasions with the air of a Jesuit, and, for the most part, deals in the sophistical reasonings of the Papists. In his grounds, &c. he attacks the Scriptures with hardly any thing else than Popish weapons. In the nineteenth number of the Independent Whig, he proposes a string of queries concerning authority in matters of faith, by which he labours to prove, that either there can be no such authority, or, if there is, it must be infallible, and reside in the pope. The noble adversary of Christianity resided long enough in Popish countries, particularly in the kingdom of Naples, to find out, that Christianity had better be either entirely laid aside, or carried up as high as Popery, which he sometimes does not scruple to intimate, although obscurely, according to his custom.

Temp. As to Tindal, he is said to have made the exit of an Atheist: whereas, had he been a Papist, he would probably have had a priest about him, at the last.

Shep. That would have spoiled all he had been doing;

and there was no occasion for the assistance of a priest, since one plenary indulgence or dispensation was sufficient to sanctify, and render meritorious, not only all his libertine labours, but all the crimes of his flagitious life, which were in some sort necessary to exemplify and recommend his writings, as they again were, to serve the purposes of Popery.

Temp. After all, does it not seem a very odd conduct in a Papist, to rivet in the minds of men such notions and principles, as cannot but oppose, in the strongest manner, the re-admission of Popery?

Shep. The several species of fanaticism, that have long prevailed in this country, are, to the full, as opposite to Popery, as Deism itself can be; and yet it is notorious, that legions of Jesuits have been employed in raising and fomenting the spirit of fanaticism, when that spirit promised fairer than all things else, to ruin the church of England. No emissary of Rome could be so stupid, as to think of serving his Master's cause among zealous Protestants by canting up any thing that hath the least look of Popery. No, sir, it must be by instilling principles so opposite to those of the church of Rome, as to parry all suspicion, and yet, in order to subvert the established religion of our country, as opposite to that too. As it is almost impossible for any man to divest himself wholly of religion, a Deist, who makes the nearest advances to absolute Atheism, retaining notwithstanding, in spite of himself, some faint sense of religion, is the most likely of all men to turn Papist, at least when death approaches; for after a life agreeable to his dissolute principles, no religion on earth, but Popery, can afford him any relief in the midst of his fears about the possibility of a future account. This the Jesuits know full well, and therefore must be sensible, that the propagation of Deism conduces more, than that of enthusiasm, or any other extravagancy, capable of being introduced into a Protestant country, to the advancement of Popery, which is not only qualified, as I have observed, to follow Deism, but even knows how to find a place in the mind of an actual Deist.

Temp. Is it possible, that any man in his senses can be at the same time both a Papist, and a Deist?

Shep. Some men among us, distinguished for their great abilities, have divided themselves between these opposites; keeping the one for practice, the other for profession; the one to live in, the other to die with.

Temp. It is not difficult to guess whom you mean.

Shep. Whether they, who propagated Deism among us, were Papists or not, it is certain, that in case a Papist were to undertake that office, he must build on no other plan than theirs, if he proposes the introduction of Popery in consequence to that of Deism. To illustrate this, give me leave to point out two or three of the most distinguished methods, followed by our libertine apostles in the good work they are pursuing. In the first place, Tindal in his 'Rights of the Christian Church,' and the authors of the 'Independent Whig,' although they set out with fine compliments to the clerical order, yet afterward endeavour to prove there is no such order among us, distinct from, and independent of, the state. They represent us, as constituted, and almost as ordained, by act of parliament. When, in pursuit of Hobbe's scheme, they insist, that the clergy ought always to be the creatures of the civil power, they serve no other cause than that of Deism, or rather Atheism; for as often as the civil power is lodged in the hands of a Pagan, there can be no ministry to preach Christianity, nor to administer its sacraments, unless we can suppose, that a Pagan emperor or king will be at the trouble of constituting and ordaining a ministry for the destruction of Paganism. On this footing Christianity could never have been introduced into the world. But when they erect this battery particularly againt the church of England, they cannot, consistently with reason, have any thing else in view, than to serve the church of Rome, from whence they borrow, *verbatim*, all they say on the subject.

Temp. It is very true. The Papists, ever since the act of supremacy, have been endeavouring to put us out of humour with our church, as a creature of the state, subsisting only on a lay constitution. And pray, is it not so in fact?

Shep. The upper order of the clergy is elected by the king; the lower orders by the bishops: but this hath nothing to do with the question; for all the orders are consecrated and ordained only by the clergy. The purely spiritual powers, such as ordaining, preaching, administering

the sacraments, &c. run only in the channel of the clergy. As to the few temporal powers, with which our church is vested, they belong to the state, and are exercised by permission, and in subordination to the state. When Deists, Papists, or Dissenters, object this subordination to us, we know very well what they mean; but those of our own church, who are taught by them to do the same, can neither make themselves intelligible to others, nor do they know what they say, or what they would be at. All they have to urge is, that one independent government within another must occasion confusion, and tend to the destruction of both; and so, no doubt they will, if they are of the same kind. But as in our constitution they are of different kinds, the one purely temporal, and the other purely spiritual, they mutually aid each other, and can never clash.

Temp. Your distinction wholly removes the difficulty; and as the Deists could not be ignorant of that distinction, their upbraiding the church of England with its subjection to the civil power, hath, I own, the appearance of a design to serve the cause of Popery.

Shep. In the next place, the Deists attack the Scriptures with Popish arguments only, proving those sacred writings to be an insufficient foundation for religion, a defective rule of faith and practice. Admit this point, sir, and you are equally prepared to build, either on the oral tradition, and infallible interpretation, of Popery, or on the natural light of Deism. But if you hold by the Scriptures, although you cannot be a Deist, yet neither can you be a Papist. The only chance, therefore, of your being gained by the Popish party, rests entirely on your regarding the Scriptures as insufficient.

Temp. No Jesuit, if he were to put on the mask of a Deist, could by any other method better serve the cause of his church, than by thus undermining the credit of Holy Writ.

Shep. Another method, by which our deistical writers serve the interests of Popery, is more refined and subtle than even this. They attack Christianity on Protestant principles, such as liberty of conscience, private judgment, and a right to propagate our own persuasions. These, which many of our divines have pushed, to the full, as far as they can

with any show of reason be carried, the Deists screw up to an extreme, destructive of all authority and institution. If a Papist were to argue with us, he could not more effectually promote the cause of Popery, than to run us into Deism on our own principles, or force us to defend ourselves with such weapons, as were employed all along by the church of Rome, against the Reformation. It is farther worth observing, that Tindal, and the other Deists, as if they had a mind to acquit Popery of giving any open to Deism, borrow all the quotations, on which they build it, entirely from Protestant divines, never once casting the odium of their own principles on Popish writers, by drawing favourable passages from their works, and wresting them to the purposes of Deism. By these means it comes to pass, that they only refute the Christianity of Protestants, not that of Papists, which they leave, with all its arguments, untouched, unanswered, and, as far as their silence can screen it, unsuspected.

Temp. I cannot see how the Deists, if they were all in reality Papists, could keep better measures with the church of Rome.

Shep. Were it not that this conversation hath been too prolix already, I could give you a competent number of instances, in which the principles of Deism and Popery discover a surprising alliance. Their objections to the Scriptures, as hath been already noted, are precisely the same. Their indulgence of vice answers the same end. The purgatory of Deists differs not from that of the Papists, only in its extent: for the Deists say, all punishments are inflicted by God, as well for the good of the sufferer, as of others; and therefore conclude, they will be merely purgative and temporary.

Temp. You have, I must confess, given your conjecture no small appearance of probability; but how is this to be reconciled with all the bitter invectives, and sarcastic jests, thrown out in the deistical writings against Popery?

Shep. If the authors were Papists, a small clause in their dispensations might sufficiently provide for such a liberty, which was necessary to conceal their real design, and mask themselves. Besides, their jests could do no great harm to Popery, against which they sometimes rail indeed, but never argue. However, sir, you might have observed, they never

level at the church of Rome, but when it is, through a supposed sameness or resemblance, to wound that of England, which they can't so decently attack by name.

Temp. This also is very observable. New fashions I find in religion as well as in clothes, or rather new improvements on the old, are manufactured abroad, and varied to the taste of a people more immediately subject to the changeable dominion of the moon than any other nation, and indeed, than all other things, except the tides. The new opinion, and the new cuff, of the year, are imported with the same wind.

Shep. By this time, sir, I believe you have enough of a conversation, that turns on topics so very foreign to the thoughts of a young gentleman. Your disposition to forsake a way of thinking most opposite to my own, and, if I mistake not, more dangerous to yourself than any other you could have had the misfortune to fall into, hath encouraged me to be too tedious and talkative; for which I have no other apology to make, but that of assuring you, from a heart which knows not how to dissemble, that I was prompted to run out into such lengths, only by a sincere affection and zeal for your happiness.

Temp. I cannot tell, whether your conversation, or the motive that gave birth to it, afforded me the greater pleasure. I regard your acquaintance, Mr. Shepherd, as the greatest blessing of my life; and with good reason; for you have been the means, under God, of restoring me to the use of my senses, and my understanding, and in so doing, to the dignity of my nature, from whence I had unhappily lapsed into blindness and brutality.

Shep. I bless God, whose wisdom and power can make even me, unworthy and contemptible as I am, the instrument of so much good.

Temp. And I have too much reason to be thankful for his compassion, shewn to me through you, not to make his servant taste the effects of that gratitude, which I cannot, at present, otherwise so well manifest to his Master. Mr. Dechaine and his chaplain have taken great offence, not only at your freedom, but your principles; insomuch that measures are already considered of, to distress you in your present situation.

Shep. His will be done, for whose service I esteem it a small matter to suffer all that Deism itself can dictate. Am I then to have the honour of a Confessor, who think myself unworthy to stand among the meanest of his servants?

Temp. You are indeed to have the honour and merit, but not the suffering: that, if you will give me leave, I intend to provide against. Your tenderness for me hath made a man your enemy, who is too powerful for you to cope with. I should therefore give but an ill account of the principles you have revived in me, should I leave you dependent on his benevolence, which he intends to shew you by all imaginable mortifications, those being, as he says, on your own principles, the chief ingredients in that discipline, which is necessary to train you to a true Christian humility. No tenant hereafter is to make you a single present; and not only your little ecclesiastical income, but your lease too, is to be disputed at law. You will pardon me, sir, if I say, I rejoice at this, because it throws you into my hands, and leaves you no room to decline the offer I am going to make you. If you will remove to my seat, you shall have a handsome apartment, and somewhat more by year, than the profits both of your lease and parish.

Shep. I was always awkward at acknowledgments; but your goodness, on this occasion, so confounds me, that I know not what to say.

Temp. I enter a caveat against all acknowledgments. Will you go with me? Will you consent to be my friend, and to improve on the good foundation you have laid in me?

Shep. I am absolutely the most unfit man in the world to live in a great family. I know nothing of ceremony and politeness, and am too old to learn. Besides, the frequent indispositions, brought on me by age and trouble, would make it extremely inconvenient, both to my dear patron and myself, to take up my abode in his house. The relation, who manages my little farm, and my other affairs for me, who comes between me and all worldly occasions of vexation, is also the only man on earth who can comfort me in my illnesses.

Temp. I begin to feel a selfish uneasiness at hearing you are sickly; because for the future I shall suffer a share of

every evil that afflicts you, and, on every attack of your disorder, shall be under apprehensions of losing a second father.

Shep. Your goodness does more honour to Christianity, than all that is said for it in the apologies of divines.

Temp. It is more in regard to your satisfaction than my own, that I will propose another scheme to you, better suited to your inclinations and state of health. On the farther side of my gardens, which are pretty extensive, stands a neat farm-house, with convenient offices, orchards, &c. To this I can annex a little parcel of grounds, and a small annuity, on which you, your relation, and two or three servants, may be as happy, as ease, innocence, and retirement, can make you. I will furnish the house, stock the farm, and provide it with all the necessary implements of husbandry. There is a door, opening out of my gardens into the fields I intend for you, to which you shall have a key, and another to my library, where you will find about three thousand volumes, collected by my father and grandfather, who were men of learning and taste. These you may use at your discretion, either in the library, or at your own house.

Shep. You open to me the most pleasing prospect that a well-disposed mind can possibly entertain itself within this world. But with what face could I accept of so much for nothing?

Temp. Do not mistake me. You have already paid the fine for this little tenure, which notwithstanding, I intend to let you at a very great rent. Somewhat more than an equivalent for them must come in to me, my family, and my other tenants. You shall be my almoner, and adviser in every thing. Your conversation is to be my chief entertainment; your exhortations and reproofs, my guides to happiness; and, that I may not too selfishly confine your talents and piety to my own use, you shall preach, visit the sick and poor, and do the other duties of a clergyman, as often as you please. Our poor sorry parson will be pleased to get an assistant, without a salary. This I tender, sir, as an offering to God, and as the first fruits of my return to him from principles odious in his sight, and a life of folly.

Shep. Undoubtedly he accepts of it as such, although I cannot, without offending him, desert a post that is now be

come of more importance than formerly, when there was no one to corrupt the principles of my flock.

Temp. As all you can wish for, is the power of doing good, will you not be able to do more in my neighbourhood, when aided by my fortune and influence, than here, opposed by those of Mr. Dechaine?

Shep. God only knows, and to him I submit the event. I love my hitherto good and innocent people, and cannot desert them in the midst of the danger they are threatened with, either through dread of the persecution I am to suffer at the hands of one gentleman, or through the desire of all those worldly comforts that are proposed to me by another. I am, however, in extreme anxiety, lest you, dear sir, should imagine, the refusal of your most generous offer proceeds from the smallest distrust of your constancy, or the most remote apprehension of your grudging the bounty, great as it is, which you have tendered.

Temp. I am fully persuaded, your soul is incapable of such a thought. Although it grieves me that I cannot more closely unite you to me, yet I dare not farther dispute the justness of your resolution, which hath something in it, that appears awful and sacred to me. But I hope, after sharing thus, by my resignation, in your sufferings, you will grant me what I am going to ask.

Shep. You can hardly ask any thing of me, which, considering what hath passed between us, you are not fully entitled to receive.

Temp. In the first place then, I ask your friendship, and every testimony that can be given of it, in your closet, in your letters, and by your visits to my house, as often as you can be spared from your duty here. In the next place, you must give me leave, in case I cannot soften Mr. Dechaine, who wants neither compassion nor good-nature, nor prevail on him to lay aside a resentment so unworthy of a gentleman, to make, out of my superfluity, some small provision against the distresses of my friend, and his relation.

Shep. As to my friendship, and the utmost demonstrations I can give of it, if I can commute them for yours, I shall make a most advantageous exchange. And as to your kind intentions to relieve me, in case I should be distressed, the rules of friendship will not suffer me to lay a disobling-

ing bar against them. However, I must insist, that, my relation and I being the best judges of our own wants, you shall do nothing till he points out the proper season for that purpose.

Temp. This latter condition is a little hard; but due regard shall be had to your modesty, as well as your necessities. My dear and worthy friend, farewell.

Shep. Farewell, good sir; and, that you may be always happy, 'stand fast in the faith; quit you like a man; be strong. Stand fast in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.'

END OF VOL. IV.

Printed by J. F. Dove, St. John's Square.